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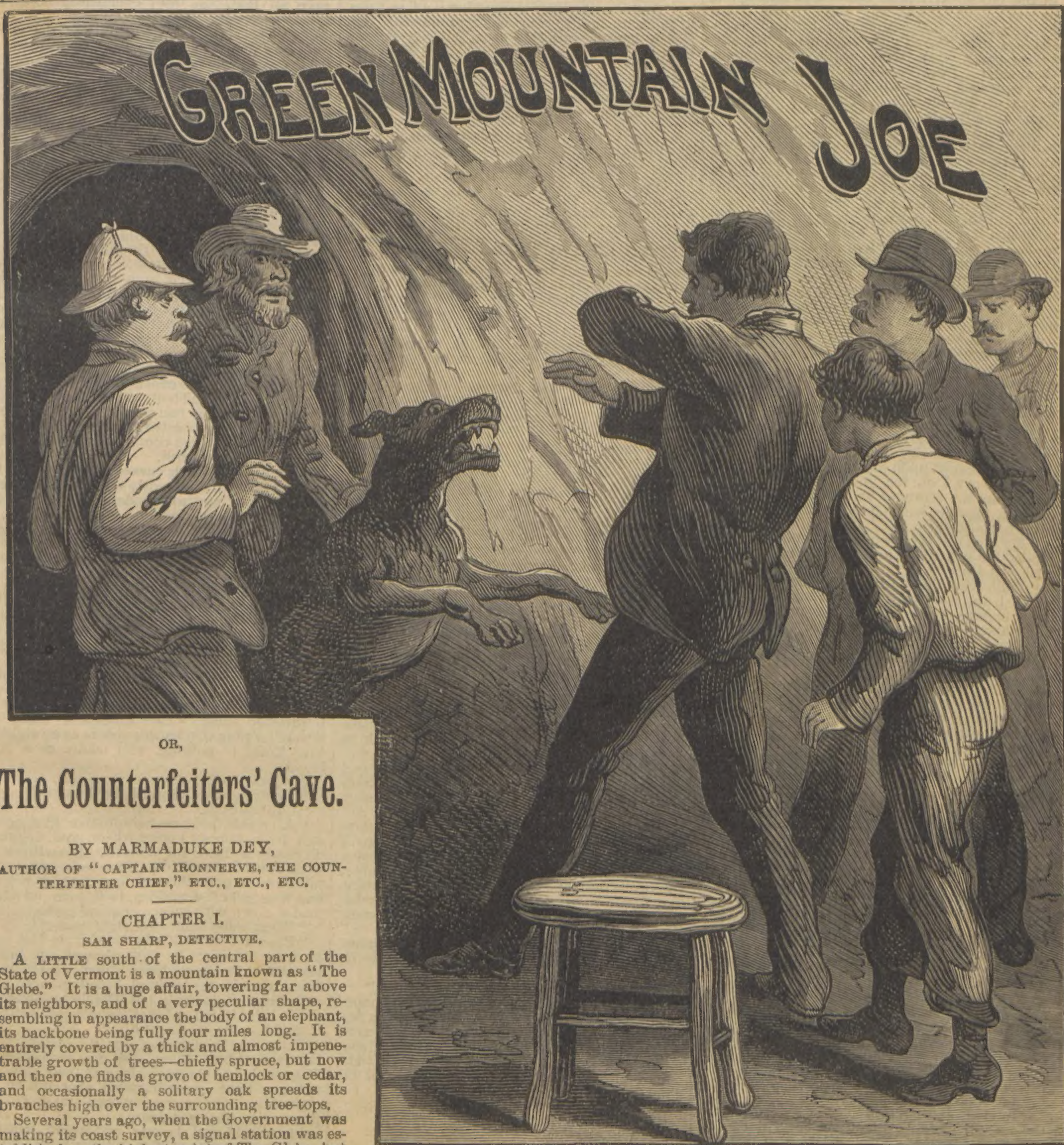
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OR,

The Counterfeiters' Cave.

BY MARMADUKE DEY,

AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN IRONNERVE, THE COUNTERFEITER CHIEF," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

SAM SHARP, DETECTIVE.

A LITTLE south of the central part of the State of Vermont is a mountain known as "The Glebe." It is a huge affair, towering far above its neighbors, and of a very peculiar shape, resembling in appearance the body of an elephant, its backbone being fully four miles long. It is entirely covered by a thick and almost impenetrable growth of trees—chiefly spruce, but now and then one finds a grove of hemlock or cedar, and occasionally a solitary oak spreads its branches high over the surrounding tree-tops.

Several years ago, when the Government was making its coast survey, a signal station was established on the highest point of The Glebe, but beyond that and one or two venturesome sporting-men, scarcely a soul has penetrated the deep

IT WAS THE DOG POMP, AND SAM SHARP KNEW THAT GREEN MOUNTAIN JOE WAS ON HAND TO HELP HIM.

forests or scaled the rocky ledges of which it is composed.

The geological formation is chiefly of marble and granite, with here and there a ledge of limestone, and in one of these last-named ledges is a commodious cave.

From one end of The Glebe to the other, on either side, there was, to the knowledge of the oldest inhabitants of the State, but one spot where it was possible to ascend the mountain with any chance of reaching the top, and that was at its northern terminus, where the ground was cleared, and formed a gentle slope of a half-mile in length, before entering the dense woods where it was next to impossible for the most venturesome and clear-headed to keep in any sort of a defined line in endeavoring to reach the summit. True, here and there could be found places where the surveying-party had cut their way through, when they established the signal-station, but even those tracks had become almost entirely obliterated.

Wyndham county had, however, one inhabitant to whom the whole country was as an open book. Its densest forests, most inaccessible heights and deepest ravines being as well known to him as the alleyways of a great city are to the gamin.

Ever since early childhood—and he was, at the time of our story, about thirty-five years of age—he had roamed the mountains, ravines and woods, and with his gun and fishing-rod, and particularly with his gun, in search of rare specimens of birds, which he mounted and sold in the cities. His name was Joseph Alden, but he was known far and wide through the State by the name of Green Mountain Joe, and his assistance had proved very valuable to the surveying-party when their duties had brought them there. Even The Glebe had not escaped his researches, for he had often been over it, in search of the plumaged prizes for which he found a ready sale.

He was a man nearly six feet in height, and rather slender, but possessing muscles like steel, and nerves which could not be shaken. He always carried a double-barreled shot-gun, and in the mysterious depths of his pockets were loaded cartridges, provided with shot of every size, from bunch-shot down to dust, for the accommodation of any kind of game that he might meet, and it was not seldom that a bear or a lynx was among the trophies that he brought home with him at night. His keen gray eyes never failed to espy whatever game crossed his path, and his trusty gun never failed to bring down whatever object it was aimed at.

Wherever he went, his two dogs accompanied him, one—Start—a bird-dog of the English Pointer breed—playing about him in the woods in search of birds, and the other—Pomp—a huge Cuban bloodhound, always at his heels, and never leaving him unless ordered to do so.

One day, when Joe and his dogs had just returned from a three days' trip in the mountains, to his cozy little home, a sharp-featured gentleman called upon him.

"What can I do for you?" Joe asked, after welcoming the stranger and placing a pitcher of cider, together with pipes and tobacco, on the table between them.

"My business is of considerable importance," replied the stranger, "and I should prefer to talk with you alone."

"Well, then," said Joe, "we can't talk business. I am sorry to disappoint you, sir, but I never engage in any business that my wife can't know about—and my dogs too, for that matter, eh, Pomp?" he continued, with a chuckle.

The stranger smiled—somewhat sarcastically, Joe thought, but said:

"Well, if that is the case, I might as well go ahead, only I wish to say that if you decide not to assist me, I request that you will at least keep in strict confidence what I shall say. I refer now to both yourself and wife."

"If you can't trust us," said Joe, shortly, "you had better not say anything. 'It's easiest."

"I think I can."

"All right, then—fire away!"

"I am an officer."

"Eh?"

"A detective."

"Oh!"

"Don't you wonder what I am here for?"

"Not much; it can't affect me, as I see," and Joe loaded his favorite pipe and went to the stove for a live coal with which to light it.

"I want your help."

"My help!" exclaimed Joe, laughing. "That's a good 'un!"

"Yes," continued the detective, eying him sharply. "I am engaged on an exceedingly difficult piece of business—a business in which I would be useless alone, in this neighborhood, and you have been recommended to me as a man who knows the country thoroughly, and is afraid of nothing, therefore I want your help."

"Drive on, stranger!" said Joe.

"In order to 'drive on' properly," continued the detective, after a slight pause, "I must tell you a little story. For the last two or three years, the public has been annoyed, and the police officers nonplused, by reason of considerable counterfeit money that has been floating

around. The bills are of all denominations, and are so nearly perfect that expert judges of counterfeit money have been deceived. We have been looking for the men who manufacture this bogus currency for a long time, but have never succeeded in obtaining any clew until recently. Now we have reason to believe that they have a regularly organized gang and are concealed somewhere in this immediate neighborhood. I have been detailed by my chief to hunt them down, and I want you to assist me. Will you do so?"

"Yes, sir, I will!" replied Joe, shortly, "and, without bragging, I'll bet Pomp there against any darned dog in the country that I can find 'em, too! When do you want to begin—to-morrow?"

"Let us talk about the pay first."

"Time enough for that. Pay when the work's done."

"No, we'll settle it now. There is a reward of ten thousand dollars for the man who will break up that gang. If we find them we will divide; is that satisfactory?"

"Well, yes, I think so," replied Joe, slowly.

"Molly, what'll we do with all that, eh?" turning to his wife.

"We haven't caught them yet," volunteered the stranger.

"That's so! but I'll bet you my share of the reward against yours that we do."

"No—no!" laughed the detective, "for then in either case I would get nothing."

"When do you want to begin?" asked Joe.

"To-morrow."

"You're a stranger around here, an' so folks 'll think it funny, your being round with me. Got a hunting-suit, like them the city fellows wear."

"Yes."

"Well, that's enough. Put it on, an' I'll tell the folks you're a city chap come up here to hunt with me, see? Can you shoot?"

"A little."

"Good! Pomp, shake hands with—I say, what's your name, anyhow? Bless if I hadn't forgot to ask you before."

"Sharp—Sam Sharp."

"All right. Shake hands with Mr. Sharp, Pomp! Start, stand up and make your bow!"

Pomp, the huge bloodhound, rose obediently and after walking entirely around the chair in which Sam Sharp was seated, solemnly extended his paw, which being shaken, he returned to his former position by the hearth, while Start stood on his haunches, and calmly nodded his head several times to the detective, after which he too returned to the fire-place.

"That bloodhound is a fine animal," remarked the stranger, looking at the dog admiringly.

"They're both fine animals in their way," replied Joe. "Some time when we're out in the woods I'll tell you some stories about them, that'll make you swear I'm lying. Pomp there, knows more than most men, and more than I do about a good many things, and he's as strong as a horse, too. Molly an' I never think of going to the spring for water. Pomp always does it. He takes the handle of the pail in his mouth and brings it back full just as easy as I could—and Start—well, he can start more birds in a day than any two other dogs in the State could in a week. I remember once—"

"Supper is ready," interrupted Joe's wife.

"She always stops me when I begin talking about the dogs," continued Joe, laughing. "Pull up your chair, Mr. Sharp, and make yourself at home, because if you don't, you'll probably wish you were, for we've got a fashion of helping ourselves here; so when you see anything you want, reach out for it."

Notwithstanding this injunction, however, Joe kept passing hot biscuits, bread, maple-syrup, and what-not, until, when the detective rose from the table, he said he did not think he had ever eaten so much at one meal before.

As soon as the supper was finished, Joe and the detective pushed back their chairs, and Sam Sharp having been tendered an extra pipe, they began smoking and arranging their plans.

"In the first place," said Joe, "I want to know all the particulars about this thing. I have never had anything to do with detective work before, and, as far as I can remember, you're the first specimen of the genuine article that I ever saw. What's the counterfeiter-feller's name, anyhow, and what do you know about him?"

"We don't know his name," replied Sharp, "and, in fact, there is very little that we do know."

"Well, give me the benefit of that little."

"We think he is one of the gang that escaped when the den in Virginia was broken up, a few years ago," replied the detective. "That crowd was run by a fellow known as Captain Iron-nerve, and we have reason to believe that the one we are after now is an old member of his gang."

"What makes you think so?"

"Their method of work is similar."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"How many do you think there are in the hull lot of 'em?"

"There must be at least a good many agents, for their work seems to extend all over the country."

"How did you trace 'em to Vermont?"

"In this way: Some little time ago I was instrumental in catching a burglar who had led us a long chase. When I caught him he was drunk, and let drop an expression which made me think Vermont was the place. I went through him—"

"Eh!" exclaimed Joe.

"Searched him, you know," continued the detective, "and found a piece of an old envelope, on which was the remnant of a postmark. All that I could make out was an 'L'—'n'—'y,' but I searched the map of Vermont carefully and found Londonderry, so I came to the conclusion that this was the neighborhood. Now you know as much about it as I do."

"That ain't very much."

"No, but it's a clew."

"Are you the only detective that is after them?"

"Bless you, no! There are a dozen. Two of them have gone to Virginia, and, I think, one besides myself is in this State."

"Do you know him?"

"Not at all. I haven't the slightest idea who he is. We may run across him some day, and may not. The chief care in my business is to work secretly and alone. Whoever he is, I have the advantage of him in having secured your services."

And so Joe and the detective talked until quite late, and when they finished, their plans were all laid, and they confidently hoped for speedy success.

Joe was certain that he could find the counterfeiters' den, if it was situated in that part of the State, and he had resolved to prosecute the search to the last extremity in assisting the authorities to break up the gang.

CHAPTER II.

CHIPMONK—JOE'S STORY.

THE morning following the conversation between Joe and Sam Sharp dawned bright and clear, as mornings in the early fall are wont to do in that region, and ere six o'clock had struck, our two acquaintances could be seen trudging their way through the little village of Londonderry toward the mountain.

Sharp was arrayed in a complete sporting equipment, game-bag and all, and over his shoulder he carried a double-barreled breech-loading shot-gun, so that, altogether, he looked a veritable city chap who had visited that section of the country in the hope of bagging a few partridges, etc., with small chance of carrying his design into execution.

"Hello, Joe!" suddenly cried a voice behind them, just as they had passed the only store of which the village boasted, and which, like all country stores, was a combination of all kinds of mercantile ventures.

Joe and Sam both turned abruptly, and beheld a mere lad, apparently not more than sixteen years of age, and undersized at that, running swiftly toward them.

"Goin' huntin'?" he asked, as he ran toward them.

"Yes, Chip," replied Joe. "Want to go along?"

"Um—course I do! Kin I?"

"I guess so," assented Joe, laughingly. "Run and get your gun and come on. We'll go along and you can catch us down the road."

"See me fly!" cried the lad, leaping away like a flash.

"Do we want this boy with us?" asked Sharp, as he and Joe continued their way.

"We'll find him useful, sir," answered Joe, in a satisfied tone. "He's quick's a flash, and handy's a plug o' tobacco; shoots as straight's I kin—'fraid o' nothing, and smart as a steel-trap."

"Who is he?"

"You've got me now, Mister Sharp—"

"Call me Sam."

"All right—he came here four or five months ago from nobody knows where, and begun to do chores and sich fur a livin'. Sometimes the little feller 'll go off into the woods and mountains and be gone three or four days, or a week, and then, all of a sudden, he'll turn up again, loaded down with spruce gum an' game."

"What is his name—his right name?"

"Blest 'f I know—Coon, I think is the name he gave us when he fuist showed up, but we thought he was more like a chipmonk than anything else in the animal kingdom and some called him Chipmonk, but, Chip's easier to say, an' so he's 'Cbip, an' that's about all anybody 'round here knows about him."

Just then the clatter of hasty footsteps could be heard behind them, and in a moment more Chipmonk was skipping along at their side, carrying a light single-barreled shot-gun in his right hand, and a powder-horn and shot-pouch flung over either shoulder.

I have said that he was undersized, but that scarcely expresses it, for judging from his stature alone, one would not have pronounced his age to be over twelve; but he looked older even

than the first estimate—sixteen—in the face, and his figure denoted unusual strength for one so young and small.

He was dressed as all country boys are dressed, except that his clothes were rather the worse for wear, and here and there showed evidences of having clambered through brambles; and, instead of tough kip boots, his feet were incased in leather moccasins made of woodchuck's hide, and evidently of his own manufacture, which was, no doubt, the result of necessity. His hair was rather long and tangled, falling upon his shoulders in an unkempt mass, while on his head he wore a common Scotch cap, pulled tightly down so that the visor closely shaded two piercing, and wonderfully bright black eyes that never rested their gaze on one object for more than an instant at a time.

"Whar ye goin', Joe?" he asked as he came up.

"Over Glebe way," answered Joe. "I thought we might find something to shoot over there."

"Mighty little," averred Chip.

"Why?"

"I see'd nothin'—bin thar three days, too; jist kim back last night."

"Get anything at all?"

"Couple o' biddies (meaning partridges), an' some gum. Say, Joe—"

"Eh?"

"It's perlite t'r introduce a feller, ain't it?"

Joe laughed outright, while Sharp, also laughing a little, said:

"My name is Sharp, young man."

"Um," said Chipmonk, innocently, but with a wicked little twinkle in his bright eyes. "Air you goin' huntin' too, Mister Sharp-young-man?"

Joe nearly doubled up with laughter, in which Sharp—who, for a moment, seemed a little indignant—finally heartily joined.

"Yes," he answered, "Mr. Alden has kindly consented to teach me how to shoot partridges, and I suspect you might be able to give me a lesson or two in that art, also."

"Can't on The Glebe," replied the lad. "Nothin' to shoot thar—cept robbers."

"Except robbers!" exclaimed Sharp, with a start of surprise.

"Um—robbers—lots o' them thar."

"Ah, you mean some kind of a bird?"

"Bird?" ejaculated the lad, indignantly.

"Say, mister, ye ain't sich a sharp young man as y'd have us think."

"Do you mean thieves?" asked Sharp, beginning to get interested, and thinking that this lad in his rambles might have discovered something that it would be worth a detective's while to know.

"Did I say anything 'bout thieves? Is robbers thieves?" asked the boy. "I said robbers, an' I meant robber."

"What causes you to think robbers are there?" asked Sharp.

"Oh, he's been readin' some novel, I guess," ventured Joe.

"Ain't, nuther!" retorted the lad. "When I was up thar, 'bout two weeks ago, I found a splendid crop o' gum in a big spruce grove, an' I didn't have my gum-bag wid me, so I jist marked that place, an' made up my mind I'd hev that gum. Wal, I went there for it, an' somebody hed been thar an' stripped the hull bizness; thar wasn't a piece left big enough to chaw."

"What of that?" demanded Sharp; "you are not the only one around here who goes gumming, are you?"

"Um—anyhow, I'm the on'y one as goes thar; Joe never gums."

"Is that all the evidence of robbers you saw?"

"Ain't that enough?"

"Bah!" said Sharp, in disgust; "I thought perhaps you had seen something worth tellin'."

The boy made no reply, and the three strode onward, and in about an hour's time commenced ascending the northern end of The Glebe, intending to reach some spot near the top by nightfall, where they could build a fire and camp.

Joe and Chipmonk kept up a continual string of conversation, in which the detective occasionally joined, but for the most of the time he was silent, his mind busy with his plans and purposes.

His name was not really Sam Sharp, that being only assumed. He rightly bore a name which had struck terror to the heart of many a criminal and he chose to keep it secret, lest the men of whom he was now in pursuit should discover that he was on their track, and accordingly lie very low until he was out of the neighborhood.

Chipmonk, the boy, puzzled him, being, as he seemed, at once a mixture of unusual shrewdness and monumental stupidity and ignorance.

And so they clambered on until about three o'clock in the afternoon, when they came to a halt on a ledge at the mountain-side, at a spot which commanded a magnificent view to the northward and westward, and where Joe said they would rest for a while and have a bit to eat.

Having provided themselves with provisions before they started, a fire was soon crackling

merrily, and the lad having run to a spring not far away, for water, coffee was speedily in operation, to wash down their sandwiches.

The lunch disposed of, Sharp lighted his pipe, and leaning his back comfortably against the trunk of a tree, said:

"Now, Joe, while we are resting, suppose you tell me one of your dog stories. Give us one about Pomp, there, for he comes the nearest to my idea of a fine dog."

"Right ye be," remarked Chipmonk, *sotto voce*. "He's a bu'ster, an' no mistake."

"Well," said Joe, blowing a mouthful of smoke into the air over his head, and gently patting the head of the huge bloodhound that was resting upon his knee. "I'll tell you a story about him that took place on this very mountain, not far from this spot, and when I'm through you will either call me a darned liar, or agree with me that there's something strange around these parts that no feller kin explain."

Sharp nodded, and Joe proceeded:

"'Twas jist about a year ago naow, and I had been about two days on this mountain, an' jist afore dark I came to a place up above here thet I call 'Rocking Tree Camp,' because there's a spring o' good water there, an' a tree right alongside of it es big 'round es my body, but all the same, Chip, here, could purty nigh rock the thing over ef he tried. I'll show it to you bimeby, fur I guess we'll camp there to-night, ef my story don't scare you out. It was jist comin' on dusk, an' I made up my mind to start a fire and settle there for the night. Well, I soon had a good fire a-goin', an' some coffee brewin' in a pot I keep there for 'mergencies. I roasted a pa'tridge and had a good, solid meal, an' then, after lighting my pipe, stretched myself out fur a comfortable smoke."

"Well, I must have been smokin' about three-quarters of an hour, an' in the mean time it had grown darker then the inside of a nigger's pocket, when all of a sudden, Pomp, who hed been lyin' 's quiet 's a kitten, lifted his head an' growled. Now, Pomp never growls unless he's got some mighty good reason fur doin' it—he's a very non-speakable dog, ain't you, Pomp?—an' I thought at once, mebbe there's a Bruin 'round here—you know the State pays two dollars fur every bear that's killed 'round here, they're such cussed nuisances—an' so I jist reached fur my gun that was leanin' ag'in' a tree, an' I'll be blowed to smithereens ef there was any gun there."

"No gun there!" exclaimed Sharp. "Where was it?"

"You jist wait," replied Joe, "an' I'll tell you all I know, an' then ef you've any questions to ax, you'll hev to answer them yourself. Well, I rubbed my eyes an' looked ag'in, but although I was sure I hed put my gun there, I was jist as sure it had walked off somehow, an' so I dove down into my pocket and hauled out this," and he exhibited a large-size Smith & Wesson self-cocking revolver. "You see, if my gun was gone, I hed a protector, an' I'd jist about made up my mind that the feller that stole that gun would get a hole in him, when I happened to look at Pomp."

"Mr. Sharp," continued Joe, impressively, "did you ever happen to see a man when he was badly frightened? Well, Pomp was es bad es any ten of 'em put together. Every hair on his back had riz up; his tail was stuck between his legs, an' he stood looking off into the woods. Now I don't scare wuth a cent, but I confess when I saw Pomp acting that way, my knees began to feel sort o' weak. However, I looked where he was lookin', an' you can pulverize me furever 'n' ever ef there wasn't a white cow, es big as any three cows you ever saw, an' with horns about six feet long, standin' right in the edge of a little natural clearin' about a hundred yards away. She was jist as white es snow—the sort o' white you kin kinder see through and at the same time can't; her eyes were as red as the danger-light on a steam engine, an' there was little flames o' fire comin' through her nostrils. My first notion was to run, but, thet's something I never did yet fur nobody, and so I jist raised this shooter an' let drive fur them eyes."

"Did you hit it?" asked Sharp.

"I never knew whether I did or not, but I do know thet thet thing disappeared es quick es you could snuff a candle. Went out like slingin' a lighted match into a basin o' water, an' I jist snatched a hunk o' wood out of the fire and went down there to see what I could see, Pomp keepin' close to my heels all the time."

"What did you find?"

"Nothin'—an' after lookin' around 's long 's the blaze lasted, I went back to my fire, an' Mr. Sharp, jist as sure as I am a livin' man, an' you're another, my gun stood ag'in' that tree jist where I put it afore I started the fire."

"Pshaw!" said the detective, contemptuously. "You fell asleep and dreamed it all."

"Did I? Mebbe so; however, you jist wait till I'm through."

"Go ahead."

"I looked at the gun and found it all right, an' then I turned to Pomp. 'Pomp,' says I, 'I'm ashamed of you' to git scart thet way; ef you're any kind of a dog, you'll find out what thet thing was,' an' I grumbled and jawed at

him for some time, so that he finally took it to heart an' went off an' laid down by himself."

"Well, I sat thinkin' the thing over, an' finally fell asleep with my back against that tree, an' I didn't wake up ag'in until daylight."

"When I did wake up, that dog was gone, an' I called, an' whistled, and spent nearly the whole day lookin' fur him, an' so I finally made up my mind thet he had got scared out and gone home, but, when I got there he hadn't, and I hed about made up my mind thet somethin' hed happened to him, when, all of a sudden, he showed up, comin' in on three legs, and with a knife hole in his shoulder, another one in his back, an' a bullet in his left foreleg! But, thet wasn't all! In his mouth he had a piece of woollen sich as pants is made of, an' his chops was covered with blood."

"He jist laid that piece of cloth in front of me, an' looked into my eyes as much as to say, 'I know what it was,' but he couldn't speak, an' so he couldn't tell me. Now, Mr. Sharp, you jist explain that ef you can."

"I think I can do that, Joe," said Sharp.

"Anyhow, I'll undertake to explain it fully, in a very short time."

CHAPTER III.

"ONTO" HIS LITTLE GAME.

OUR next scene is the interior of a huge cavern in the mountain I have already described, and on which our three friends were taking lunch and listening to Joe's dog story.

The first part of the cavern which claims attention is the room used by the gang as a press and engraving room, and was perhaps fifty feet square, while the ceiling or roof was fully twenty feet overhead. From this room led off three halls, and following the first one about fifty or sixty feet, one would find himself confronted by a heavy iron door that could be knocked down by nothing less than a battering-ram, and behind this door was the counterfeiters' store-room, where good and spurious money were alike kept. The next, and what was known as the middle corridor, led away back into the mountain, and, for the present, we will rest content with the knowledge that it was very extended, and gradually became smaller, until a man going through it was compelled to resort to his hands and knees, to escape bringing his head in contact with the sharp stalactites that hung from its roof.

The right hand, or "Captain's Corridor," was a trifle longer than the first one described, and if the reader will go back with me to the time when this place was inhabited by the counterfeiters, we will follow this last-mentioned hallway or corridor together.

After proceeding about a hundred feet, we are confronted by another iron-bound door, not unlike the one in the Left Corridor, and on the face of which, by the light of the lantern, we discern a white knob, which we pull sharply, and almost immediately an iron wicket in the center of the door falls away and a voice says, from the inside,

"Who's dar?"

If we are of the initiated, the password is given; then the door is slowly swung open, and we find ourselves in a room about twelve or fifteen feet square, while towering above us, prohibiting any further progress seemingly, is a huge negro, considerably over six feet high, black as night and evidently a man of great physical strength.

The black at once asks us our business, and we reply by stating that we desire to see the captain, and requesting us to be seated on some common wooden chairs, he leaves us alone for a moment, disappearing through another door at the further end of the room through which he passes only after pulling a similar knob at its side, and which immediately thereafter appears to open of its own volition, it being worked by a latch not unlike those in use in the common flats in the city, where the door can be unlocked and sprung open from the room above.

In a few minutes the negro returns and announces that he has presented our names to the chief, who has consented to receive us, and we follow our conductor through the inner door, and after traversing a short corridor, we push aside a pair of heavy curtains and immediately find ourselves in the private apartment of the counterfeiter chief.

From the hard earthen floor we have now come upon magnificent tiling, and strewn over it, in every conceivable shape and pattern are numerous Turkey and Persian rugs of the richest textures. The four walls are hung with heavy velours curtains, completely hiding the rocks which nature placed there, and over these are tastefully arranged a number of fine engravings and paintings. In the center of the room stands a table upon which lie several books of recent date, together with bric-a-brac and a common student lamp, and over the table a huge stalactite hangs, which, having been utilized as a chandelier, glistens in the light of a dozen wax candles arranged upon it. A slow fire burns in an open fireplace at one side of the room; a desk, strewn with papers, is in one corner, while easy lounging-chairs stand in con-

venient positions, in one of which, with his slippered feet upon the fender, half-sits and half-reclines a man about thirty years of age.

He does not arise as we enter, merely lifting his eyes, and giving us a careless nod.

To say he is a handsome man is only to use a common word to express something which strikes us as being extremely uncommon. If it were possible to use the term "beauty," as applied to a man we find here, in this chief of the counterfeiters the explanation of such possibility.

His hair is jetty black, and curls just enough to give it a graceful, wavy appearance, curving artistically over a broad, white forehead, that looks as though it never had been, and never expected to be burdened by care. His eyes, set rather wide apart, are also black, and look at you with a half-quizzical, half-searching, but withal sympathetic and kindly glance. His finely-chiseled mouth is half-shaded by a very long, yet very elegant and finely-shaped mustache, which is the same color as his hair, and is brought out in bold relief by reason of an unusually white complexion. He is reclining in an easy-chair, to be sure; nevertheless, we can readily see that, when standing erect, he is a man considerably over the medium size, possessing a pair of broad shoulders, a full, rounded chest, evidencing more than ordinary strength; and if we care to look behind the quizzical glance of his eyes, we speedily come to the conclusion that there is a world of resolution and daring concealed beneath that careless, and at times flippant exterior.

Such is Captain Quickeye, the chief of the counterfeiters, known also to the police as "Bank-Note Bill, the Counterfeiter King."

We must consider ourselves as particularly favored by being allowed this interview, for it is one of the chief's rules never to admit more than one of his men to his private apartment at a time, and the one admitted must be especially in his captain's confidence, or even he will be obliged to communicate his wishes by messages delivered through the agency of the negro attendant.

On the afternoon of the day when our three acquaintances began their search for the counterfeiters' retreat, Captain Quickeye was seated in the manner described above, and in his hand he held a closely-written sheet of paper which he was intently inspecting, while a half-cynical, half-amused smile lit up his face.

"So this is a description of the great counterfeiters," he soliloquized, "the 'shover of the queer,' the man who thus far has outwitted every one who has been set to capture him. Let me see," he continued, reading aloud from the paper before him. "Probably a former member of Ironhorse's Virginia Gang, and in that case, one of three: Munger, a half-Italian (supposed to be dead, but who may have escaped), short, thick-set and about fifty years old,—not bad, only Munger is dead. Roebuck settled his hash. 'A negro, name unknown—over six feet high, shrewd, but ignorant, mark of a bullet on forehead,—very good, but being my servant, he is hardly the chief—or William Maynard, a former agent of the old gang, known at that time as Bank-Note Bill, tall, slim, wiry, rather muscular, handsome'—thanks awfully!—'Dundreary side-whiskers'—if he hasn't cut them off—very black; hair and eyes black also; little finger of left hand missing,—glad they don't know I've got a false one in my glove that I always wear when out in society. 'This we think is more likely to be the man—\$10,000 reward for his capture.' Well, that is a pretty fair description, considering their opportunities for securing it. I wonder what they would think if they knew that I systematically put myself in their clutches very often."

He rose, and going to the table in the center of the room, took a cigar from a box and lighted it.

"Pah!" he said, contemptuously, as he once more threw himself carelessly into his chair. "This detective business is all humbug. I fancy I could teach any one of their ferrets a point or two worth knowing."

He reached out his hand and tapped a little silver bell beside him, and presently the herculean negro pushed aside the curtains and entered.

"Sam," said the chief, "is that new set of twenties and tens finished?"

"Yes, sah, all done."

"Get them, and pack them in my traveling bag."

"Yes, sah."

"Put in a few fifties and hundreds, also."

"Yes, sah."

"I will go to New York to-night."

"Yes, sah."

"Is there any news?"

"Dere is."

"What?"

"Martin jist cummed in—"

"Well?"

"He tole me to acquaintance yo' wiv le fac' dat dere war some white folks on de mounting, 'bout a mile below here to de norf."

"Well, why did you not do so?"

"Jes' foun' it out, sah."

"Who are they?"

"Mounting Joe's one, Chipmonk's nudder, an—"

"Chip, eh?"

"Yes, sah, an' tudder one's a stranger."

"A stranger, eh? What were they doing?"

"Eatin', sah."

"Armed?"

"Yes, sah."

The chief was silent for a moment.

"Go and get Martin and bring him to me," he said finally.

"A stranger, eh?" he soliloquized, when the negro had left the room. "There are two constructions to put upon his presence. He may be a city chap who has come up here to shoot, and has engaged Joe as a guide, and again, he may be a smart detective who has traced me to these mountains, and is covering his real business with a fowling-piece. I think I will have to look into this matter a little."

"Ah, Martin," as Sam ushered that confederate into the captain's sanctum, "Sam tells me that you have discovered some one on the mountain. Describe this stranger to me."

"He's about five feet six or seven, broad shouldered, light hair, smooth face, and weighs about a hundred and sixty pounds."

"Did they hear you around them?"

"Not much, they didn't."

"What were they doing when you saw them?"

"Eating their lunch."

"Who do you think this stranger is?"

"Don't know, sir; looks like a dry goods clerk on a vacation, more'n anything else."

"How was he dressed?"

"In a regular hunting-suit, such as they sell on Broadway in N' York."

"Fancy?"

"Very much so."

"Game bag?"

"Elegant one—all worked with hedgehog's quills."

"What do you think of him, Martin? Is he a city chap up here for a shoot—or is he a detective that has found some clew to bring him here?"

"He might be either—I don't know."

"He'll bear watching for awhile, anyway. Chip's being with him suggests that. That will do Martin; keep your eye on him."

"Let me see," thought Quickeye, aloud, when the negro and Martin had left the room. "If this fellow was only some one who had engaged Joe as a guide to show him where to shoot, the Vermonter would make him sling away that game bag as an incumbrance; if he wanted him to appear such, he would advise its being worn. Good! Second thought: If he came to this part of the country merely to shoot, or pretending that, this is the last place that Joe would have taken him to for game, at this season, for the birds are all feeding on berries and grain now. Good again! Third thought: If he is a detective who has picked up some clew to our whereabouts, and has gone to Joe and frankly stated his business, offering the countryman a share of the reward—and if he is a detective that is just what he has done—this would be the first place to which Joe would bring him, for he has seen and heard enough on this mountain to make him think there is something here besides trees and rocks. Good again! Fourth thought: Chipmonk is with him, and, to my mind, that means a good deal. I think I have unraveled the tangle. Summary: First, he's one of Pinkerton's men whose description I don't recognize—second, he has found some clew to bring him here; what it may be, I haven't an idea;—third, he has selected Joe, as knowing the country thoroughly, made a clean breast of the thing to him, and secured his services;—fourth, he is on this mountain, looking for me; and fifth and last, he won't find me for I am on to his little game."

The King of the Counterfeiters was silent a moment, lost in thought, and then rising, he added:

"I'll run down to New York for a few days, and attend to my business there, and then I'll come back, and give this fellow about as lively a time as he ever had. He has come up here to fix me, but I'll just fix him instead," and he tapped the bell sharply, bringing the negro attendant to him, almost on a run.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FEMALE DETECTIVE.

POLICE HEADQUARTERS in the City of New York were unusually quiet, when, about noon-time one day, two weeks before the opening of this story, the closely-veiled figure of a lady asked the privilege of an interview with the inspector, and after waiting some five or ten minutes in the outer office, she was ushered into that august presence.

The inspector (than which perhaps there is no shrewder, sharper, clearer-headed, and at the same time kindlier officer in the world), who is never surprised at anything, came near giving a little start of wonder and astonishment when his visitor threw back her veil, disclosing a magnificently beautiful face, full of sadness, but yet exquisitely charming and fascinating. Little lines of care and touches of gloom lent rather an added interest to the somber, yet mighty fire

that dwelt in her great, round, black eyes, and her full, red lips would have been irresistibly attractive but for the suggestion that they never parted but to give utterance to a sob; and even the inspector, as he gazed upon his visitor, wished within himself that she would smile, her entire face filling him with the thought of a beautifully-decorated ball-room with the lights out and the guests departed.

"What can I do for you, madam?" the inspector inquired, rising and offering her a chair.

Her black eyes drooped, and the faintest evidence of a blush came for an instant to her cheeks, but she took the proffered chair, and after a moment's silence, replied:

"I have come to you on a strange errand, sir, and one in which I fear you will feel some reluctance to acquiesce."

"Nevertheless," he said courteously, "I will be pleased to hear what you have to say, and"—recognizing a refined lady in the person before him—"render you any aid I can."

"I thank you, sir."

Her voice was low and sweet, but even that seemed impregnated with the germ of sorrow that pervaded even the atmosphere she breathed.

"Who I am, cannot matter to you, sir," she continued slowly, "beyond the fact that I am a lady, descended from a once prominent family of New Orleans, and that by an act solely my own, I am now estranged from them forever."

"I have been a resident of this city about three years, and during that time have supported myself chiefly by the aid of my pen. I could do so still, but—"

She hesitated, and again the slight blush mounted to her face, and the inspector inwardly wondered what was coming next; but he said nothing, and in a moment she had recovered herself and continued:

"But for months an idea has haunted me until it almost amounts to a mania. I have always been a close reader of the newspapers, sir," she went on, forgetting her confusion in the interest which she felt in her subject, "and for some time I have noticed articles, paragraphs, and even editorials about a company of counterfeiters—"

"What!" exclaimed the inspector, actually starting with surprise. "I beg pardon, madam, but you surprised even me. I think that is about the last subject to which I expected you to refer. But pray, go on."

"I have been very much interested in those articles, sir, and I have felt the impression growing upon me, that I can materially aid in bringing their leader to justice."

"In what way, madam?"

"By going in search of them. In short, by becoming a detective, pure and simple, even though I am a woman."

"Impossible, madam."

"Why?"

"These fellows are a set of desperadoes."

"Even so, sir, I do not fear them."

"Impossible!" and the inspector shook his head.

"Again, why?"

"My dear madam, few men are courageous and daring enough to undertake the work of a detective—the hunting down and capturing of creatures who carry their lives on their coat sleeves, and who fear nothing but the leashes of the law; and of those few who possess the courage and the nerve, a very small percentage have the cunning and the quick intelligence requisite for such an occupation."

"But, sir, I possess all those requirements—courage, nerve, intelligence. I am a woman, true, and therefore I have not the strength of a man, and I realize fully that there are many places where I, as a woman, cannot go; but, has it ever occurred to you that there are also many places where a man may not enter? where the keen, penetrating intelligence of a woman, properly applied, is sure of accomplishing something?"

Her eyes glowed, her form dilated, and her voice became firm and even as she spoke.

"I tell you, sir," she went on, "that I have spent months thinking on this subject, until I have become so thoroughly imbued with the idea that I can unlock the door of this man's hiding-place, that I have firmly resolved to undertake it, whether I have your 'co-operation' or not."

"How will you accomplish it?"

"Without your aid, it will be slow work, sir, for I will be obliged to work two-thirds of my time with my pen, in order to maintain myself the other third. I do not come to you seeking employment, nor am I, as you may possibly think, a monomaniac on this subject, but I have thought this matter over until I know that I can succeed."

"What do you wish me to do to aid you?" asked the inspector beginning to feel the glow of his companion's enthusiasm.

"This, sir. Engage me regularly as a detective. Allow me sufficient salary only to feed me and give me a place to sleep—one room somewhere. Take me on probation for one month, and if at the end of that time I have not discovered something which you deem worthy of pursuing, you may discharge me, and I will work hard with my pen and needle to repay the

municipality every cent that has been advanced me, and in the mean time I will deposit with you as an earnest that I will carry out my agreement, a diamond bracelet that was a present to me several years ago, and which I would not lose for thrice its intrinsic value. You may consider this as a mere business proposition, if you wish."

For a moment the inspector was silent. Never before, in the many years he had held his position, had so strange a proposition been made him, and he felt that, inasmuch as the proposal was extraordinary, it required unusual thought and reflection before deciding the point.

Finally he said:

"I confess, madam—by the way, I did not catch your name when you mentioned it."

"I did not mention it. My name is Preston—Vera Preston—at least that is the name I have borne since I have been in this city. Vera being the only one of the two names that is really mine. When occasion requires, I will have no hesitation in giving you my true name, but until then, I would rather be known to you as Madam Preston."

The inspector bowed.

"I thank you for your frankness," he said. "It is better to be frank with me, and it will add some weight to the consideration which I was about to tell you I would give to your request. If you will call here again to-morrow at this hour, I will talk with you further, and in the mean time will have come to some conclusion regarding your remarkable proposition."

"Thank you, sir," replied Madam Preston, rising and drawing down her veil. "I will call to-morrow at half-past twelve."

As she turned to leave the room there was a hasty tap at the door, and it was immediately opened, admitting a tall, fine-looking man, who, when he saw that there was some one present besides the inspector, came to an abrupt halt.

"I beg your pardon, inspector," he said. "I was told outside that you were alone."

He turned to leave the room when the inspector stopped him, saying:

"The lady is about leaving; you may come in."

At the first sound of the stranger's voice, Vera Preston gave a start of surprise, and put her hand to her bonnet, but finding that she had already lowered her veil, recovered her composure almost instantly. She was glad to see that neither of the men had noticed her momentary confusion, and with a graceful bow, she walked slowly to the door and disappeared through it.

In a moment more she was in the street, and hurrying to a corner she found a boy to whom she gave some silver, telling him to run for a coupe and have it there as quickly as possible.

"So!" she whispered under her breath, when the boy had shot off on his errand. "I have a clew already! I must know where you go, Arnold Holt, and in the long, weary days of watching and waiting that are to come, I must always know where to put my hand on you, at any cost. Time makes all things even, and I will bring you to your just deserts if I have life and strength."

A cab rattled hurriedly up to her, and stopped, the driver asking her if she was the lady that had sent for a carriage.

She motioned him to come down from his box.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Mike, lady."

"Do you want to earn a five-dollar bill?"

"Tis myself that does that!"

"Do you know how to keep your mouth closed?"

"Luk at me now!" and he closed his lips tightly together making a laughable grimace.

"Well, pay attention."

"That I will."

"Do you know that place?" pointing to the Headquarters.

"I do that, and more loike it."

"I am going to get into your cab, and I want to sit on your box, and wait here until you see a tall, dark man, wearing a mustache and goatee, come out of there. I will be looking also, and if he is the right one, I will tap on the roof of your cab three times. Do you understand?"

"Faith, I do so."

"When you hear those taps, you are to follow that man wherever he goes, not losing sight of him for an instant, but you must be careful to keep far enough behind so that he will not suspect he is being followed. Can you do that?"

"Sure! 'Twon't be me first trial aither."

"If you find out where he is stopping I will give you five dollars—if not, I'll pay you for your time."

"Be the powers, I'll follie 'im till ould Rip takes a second nap, I will," said the Irishman, as Vera entered the cab, and he climbed to his box, lighted a short pipe, and settled himself as though he never expected to leave that spot again.

When Vera bowed and vanished through the door of the inspector's office, the new-comer gazed intently at her.

"By Jove!" he said, when she had gone, "you have had a higher-toned visitor than usual, inspector; the old story, I suppose; some deluded creature who thinks your men are created for the express purpose of following suspected husbands about."

"A little that way," replied the inspector, carelessly.

"May I ask who she is? I fancied there was something rather striking in her appearance."

"I see no objection to your asking, but as I know as little as you do, you will have to look elsewhere for an answer. Did you get my note all right, Bertrand?"

"Oh, yes, certainly; that's why I am here."

"Will you undertake the job?"

"I don't know about that," replied Daniel Bertrand, for that was the name by which the inspector knew his visitor. "You see, I have rather knocked off that sort of work lately, since I received that little fortune I told you about from my uncle in the South; besides, this strikes me as being a particularly difficult piece of shadowing."

"That is the reason I sent for you. I am convinced that this fellow we are after is no other than Bank-Note Bill, and he is as shrewd as they make 'em."

"But, why do you particularly desire my services?"

"Because I think you are the only man that can outwit him."

"Have you any clew?"

"Not the slightest."

"And I am to commence operations on—"

"Nothing."

"You ask too much, my dear inspector; I can't do it."

"Yes, you can—"

"But I—"

"Now, look here, Bertrand; I did you a favor once; I want you to do this for me now."

"Well, if you put it in that way—"

"I do."

"Very well; what are your orders?"

"Find and capture this devil of a counterfeiter."

"Have you nothing to give me—some clew to start on?"

"Nothing, only what you will find on that sheet of paper. Put it in your pocket, and read it over at your leisure."

"Anything more now?"

"Nothing."

"Then I'll get out. If I have got to undertake this job, I've got another pretty big one on hand to get ready for it."

"Very well; good-day."

"Good-day, inspector," and Bertrand left the office, and started down Mulberry street on a quick walk.

But as he went, a little one-horse cab followed slowly after him, twisting and turning as he twisted and turned, always keeping far enough behind, so that he had no thought of being followed.

Who was Vera Preston?

Who was Daniel Bertrand?

What relation did they bear to each other?

Time will show.

CHAPTER V.

"BUT ONE, AND SHE IS DEAD."

"So!" said Daniel Bertrand to himself, as he walked rapidly along the street, "I am engaged in the difficult job of capturing the great counterfeiter, am I?" and he laughed audibly, a sort of self-satisfied chuckle, hard to analyze by the casual listener. "The inspector thinks I am the only available man who can accomplish that little feat, eh? Well, think he is about right. I certainly could deliver up the notorious Bank-Note Bill if I chose, but I don't choose—at least, not yet!"

Daniel Bertrand had been known to the inspector some three or four years, two of which he had been attached to the force as a sort of special, and had demonstrated remarkable skill in the working out of two or three unusual cases to which he had been assigned. One, in particular, had established his record, and rendered him, in the judgment of his superior, a valuable acquisition to the detective corps, that of an inexplicable murder which had been committed in one of the up-town streets, and to which no clew could be obtained. Several of the smartest men on the force had essayed to unravel the mystery, but had signally failed, and, it being about the time when Bertrand first appeared in New York, he had been given the job as a trial of his skill. He disappeared entirely from the city, and for several months nothing was seen or heard of him, and the inspector had made up his mind that his new recruit had abandoned the "shadow" business in disgust, when one morning he entered his office and found Bertrand sitting there, smoking a cigar, as unconcerned as though he had only been absent a day or so.

"I've got your criminal," he said carelessly.

"You have! Where is he?"

"He, is a she, my dear inspector."

"But a woman never could have committed that crime."

"Nevertheless, a woman did. She is now at the Woman's Hospital in — street, dying, and if you will take the trouble to go there, she will no doubt tell you the story. When you have heard it, and are satisfied, you can just make that little check payable to yours truly. I mean the reward, you know, and then, my dear sir, if you'll just accept my resignation, to take effect six months from date, you'll oblige etc., etc., Daniel Bertrand."

"But," said the inspector, "you are too valuable a man for us to spare."

"Sorry, I'm sure."

"Why do you wish to leave us?"

"An old uncle of mine shuffled off the mortal coil the other day, and, what surprises me very much, he hadn't forgotten my existence."

"Did he leave you something?"

"Yes, rather."

"What?"

"His blessing, and—enough to loaf on. Now my great ambition above all things, is to loaf, therefore I resign."

"I'm sorry to lose you, Bertrand."

"Thanks."

"Wont you remain as a special?"

"What is that?"

"Oh, if anything of importance comes up, I would like to feel that I can call on you to help me out. You will be your own master, to come and go as you please, but I won't have lost so valuable a man, entirely."

"Well, if you desire it, I see no objections. After all, I rather like the excitement of the chase, if one does not get too much of it."

And so it was settled. During the time that had elapsed since the above conversation, he had been assigned to a few cases and had always worked them out successfully, and finally the one in point, having baffled some of the shrewdest of the men, was put into his hands.

After walking a few blocks, he turned a corner, sprang on a car, and ere long was registering his name at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, sending a messenger to the Grand Central Depot for his traveling-bag.

As he turned away from the book, after writing his name, a lady, closely veiled, stepped to the clerk's desk.

"By Jove!" he murmured. "The inspector's visitor! I wonder who she is," and he paused to listen.

"I am expecting a friend here from the West," she said, with a marked French accent, to the clerk. "May I look at the register a moment?"

"Certainly, madam," turning the book so that she could scan it, and her eyes quickly lit upon the last entry, "Daniel Bertrand, New York."

"Perhaps I can give you the information you desire," continued the polite clerk, "and spare you the trouble of looking over the names."

"I am looking for Mr. Arnold Holt—"

"What!" said a sharp voice behind her. "I beg your pardon, madam," continued Bertrand, trying vainly to peer through the meshes of her veil, "but you mentioned the name of a very dear friend of mine, whom I have not seen for years. May I venture to inquire if he is expected here?"

"He is, sir, and I am very anxious to know if he has arrived," she replied, with the accent even more apparent than before.

"No such name registered," said the clerk. "If you will leave your card, it will be given him as soon as he is here."

"Thank you," she replied. "I will do so," and she handed a black-bordered card to the clerk, on which was engraved the name "Vera Preston, 21 East —th street."

Then she addressed herself to Bertrand.

"You say you are a friend of Mr. Holt—may I ask your name?"

"Bertrand—better known to him as Dan."

"Ah! where did you know him?"

"We were college chums—roomed together, you know, and all that."

"Were you ever told that you resembled him?"

"Oh, yes, often—not at all uncommon for us to be taken for brothers—twins, you know. Do you notice a resemblance?"

"A very striking one."

They were slowly walking toward the front door together.

"Can you tell me where Holt is now?" asked Bertrand, heartily wishing he could see through that veil.

"No, I cannot."

"Have you seen him lately?"

"Oh, yes; quite recently."

"Well, I hope."

"Quite so."

"I have often heard him speak of his sister. May I inquire if I am conversing with her?"

"I am not his sister."

"Ah, pardon me; I thought perhaps you might be. May I trespass upon politeness a little further?"

"To what extent, Mr.—Bertrand?"

"This. I am obliged to leave town early in the morning, and will therefore probably miss my old friend. Will you kindly remember me to him?"

"With pleasure—since you are leaving the

city. Do you remain long away? for I think Mr. Holt will remain in the city some time."

"I shall be gone about two weeks—not longer I think."

"I must bid you good-afternoon now, Mr. Bertrand, and since you have been so kind as to give me your name, and are as you say you are, a friend of Mr. Holt's, I will leave my card with you. It is very possible that our—friend will be with me by the time you return," and she handed him a duplicate of the card she had given the clerk. "Good-afternoon, sir."

"Good-day, madam," replied Bertrand, holding the door open for her to pass through, and watching her as she stepped into the cab in waiting. As soon as it drove away, he made straight for the bar-room, and called for brandy, pouring out rather a large drink of it, which he tossed off without a wink.

"I'm knocked out in the first round," he muttered as he strolled back into the office. "What a dolt I am not to have followed that cab, but then, a fellow can't be supposed to think of everything at once, and her mentioning that name Holt doubled me all up. Who the deuce is she, anyway? Holt, eh? looks like me too!" and he scowled darkly, then broke into a laugh.

"I've been called smart," he muttered, after remaining lost in thought for a moment or two, "but my own private opinion is, that I am about the biggest blockhead in New York. Either way I put it, I'm a monumental idiot. In the first place, if she is really looking for a fellow named Holt who looks like me, I'm a fool for bothering my head about it; in the second place, if it is myself she wants, I'm an awful fool for letting her quietly walk off without finding where she went to. Either way, my opinion of Dan Bertrand has taken a drop. I'll just call myself—the other fellow a few moments, and think this thing out."

"Starting on the basis that I am the Holt she is after, who would have any object in seeking me? But one being that I ever knew, and she is dead. Dead, because I saw her in her shroud, and heard the funeral services read over her remains. Dead, because I dealt the blow that brought that beautiful life to an end and because her face has haunted me like a specter, ever since—dead—dead! If I could wrest that one chapter from the volume of sin that is mine to answer for, I would willingly stand at the bar of justice and answer for the others twice over!"

"Bah!" he continued, rising from the settee where he had thrown himself, and going out on the street. "Why should this veiled woman, with her French accent and a face I could not see, bring up these memories to haunt me? Let me see her card—Miss Smith or Miss Jones, I suppose," slowly opening his card-case, where he had thrust it when it was given him.

"Vera!" he cried, staggering back, and grasping the wheel of a carriage standing close to the curbstone.

In an instant he recovered himself, and once more glanced at the little piece of pasteboard.

"Preston," he said; "Vera Preston. I am losing my senses, I think. She was not the only person in the world who bore the name of Vera. Another coincidence, that is all. Strange, though—very strange. Whoever you are, Madam Preston, I must know you better; I must know who the Arnold Holt is whom you seek. I must know, and I will!"

CHAPTER VI. TRAPPED!

CAPTAIN QUICKKEYE arrived safely in New York the following evening, soon after dark, having rode horseback to Chester, a distance of about twenty miles from his cavern, in time to catch the early morning train on the Connecticut River R. R. for New York.

The horse he rode, and which he left in the care of the hostler of the Central House, was kept in a little stable which he had erected on one of the semi-table-lands on the steepest side of the mountain, where no one would ever attempt to go without knowing the path, and he was very careful never to take the animal out, except under cover of the darkness.

When he sprung from the cars at the Grand Central Depot, one would scarcely have recognized him, from the description already given of his personal appearance, although the change was really so slight that one would have looked again, and wondered a little where one had seen that face before, and finally have given it up, not being able to place him.

He was a man who did not believe in perfect disguises, arguing that the minions of the law were always looking out for them, prepared to detect their existence, and see through them; but he claimed that if a person seeking to avoid detection changed his appearance just enough to destroy the identity, leaving enough of the original to puzzle the beholder by its resemblance to the face sought for, the most cunning detective would be disarmed at once, on the principle that the person sought was too cunning and crafty to resort to an imperfect disguise. Furthermore, he knew that those who were then seeking him had not seen him in several years, and would not be apt to recognize him in any case.

Stepping gayly from the car, he looked a veritable man of the world, more burdened by its pleasures than its cares, as he paused a moment to light his cigar and have his boots shined.

When that was done, he accepted the proffered services of one of the myriad of hackmen that render the life of a new arrival in New York a burden, and was soon bowling rapidly toward the Fifth Avenue Hotel, where he partook of a hearty dinner.

"Let me see," he murmured, pausing in the hotel doorway after his repast was finished; "I have a good deal to do in the week I have allowed myself here, but I guess I can complete it all. First I'll go to the Nest, and see how things are progressing there. I fancy the boys want a little word of authority among them by this time," and he called a cabman from the Square opposite.

"How much to the Forty-second street Ferry?" he asked.

"One dollar, sir," replied cabby.

"Very well, here is your dollar. I believe in paying in advance. No hurry, you know; just take it easy, as I have plenty of time, and want to finish my cigar before getting there."

In a moment more the cab had been driven across the street and he got in leisurely, again admonishing the driver not to abuse his horse by hurrying too rapidly, as he had plenty of time.

It was night, the reader will remember, and quite a dark one, a slight rain having begun to fall, and the cab rolled slowly up Broadway to Forty-second street, turning west from there toward the ferry. Seventh avenue was passed, then Eighth, and then the carriage rolled across Ninth avenue, under the Elevated railway; but it had gone but a few rods beyond it when one of the doors opened slowly, but fully, a man swung himself out upon the step, braced himself by seizing the guards, carefully and silently swung the door past him, cautiously turned the handle, latched it, and sprang off into the street, standing motionless until he saw that the driver had not observed him.

"Unnecessary perhaps," he said to himself, as he walked rapidly toward the Elevated station, "but a fellow can never tell who is standing near, listening to what is said, and whoever heard me hire the cab, probably thought I was going to Weehawken."

The man who entered the cab at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and the man who left it at Ninth Avenue were without doubt the same, but few would have believed it, even after having seen them both, for while the first was a man young in years, wearing a black mustache and imperial, the one who vacated the conveyance en route was evidently fifty years of age, wore a gray mustache, and a full beard which was rapidly growing white. The first had worn a soft felt hat, set jauntily on one side of his head—the other wore a black alpaca high hat set squarely over shaggy gray eyebrows; in short, Captain Quickkeye had quickly and effectually disguised himself while in the cab, substituting an opera hat for the soft one, which he put in his pocket, and as he climbed the stairs that led to the station, he looked a commonplace middle-aged, respectable gentleman.

He took a down-town train, rode all the way to South Ferry, crossed on the boat, and when on the Brooklyn side, took the little red cross-town car that runs down to the Erie Basin, and rode about half or three-quarters of an hour.

When he left the car he walked down toward the water front, and out on a pier that jutted out a couple of hundred feet, pausing when at about the center of the structure and stamping three times soundly on the planking, then pausing an instant and stamping twice more.

A full minute passed, and then he heard a peculiar whistle immediately beneath him, which he answered, when two of the planks, cleated together on the other side, slowly rose at one end, and a man's head protruded from the opening thus caused.

"Who's who?" asked the head.

"Here," replied the captain.

"Friend or foe?" was the next question.

"Both," and then the head disappeared, and Bank-Note Bill, after looking cautiously around to see that no one had observed the little scene, let himself quickly through the opening, and vanished out of sight, the planks noiselessly dropping into place, and all was quiet.

A passing policeman, drowsy and careless, had seen the man go down, and had stood waiting for his return, scarcely knowing why, the night being too dark to see any one on the pier from the shore. Not seeing him come back, he went after him, but of course saw no one, and after gazing over into the dark waters a moment, shook his head, muttering something about "another fool of a suicide," and returned to his beat, forgetting (?) to report the occurrence when relieved from duty a few hours afterward.

The opening through which Bank-Note Bill disappeared, let him into a crib that formed a part of the foundation of the pier, and which at high tide, was filled with water, and was even then dripping and slippery. One of the logs that formed it worked on a pivot, and was slowly swung open, allowing Quickkeye and

his interrogator sufficient room to pass through into the next one, and so on until they had traversed four of these cribs, the opening from the last one, letting them into the base of the pier, under the pavement of the street, where a sort of underground hallway led up a slight incline, running straight back into the high land beyond. Presently they came to a flight of stairs, feebly lighted by a jack which the guide carried, which they ascended about thirty steps, then along another passage-way, finally coming to a full stop in front of a huge stone that seemed to absolutely bar further progress. But Bank-note Bill struck the stone sharply with the butt of his revolver, precisely as he had stamped on the planking of the pier, and in an instant the stone slowly swung from its place, allowing the two men to step through the aperture, and into the lighted room beyond.

It may be wondered how the stamping of one's foot on the planking of the pier could be heard at such a distance, but that was effected by an electric bell so arranged that by stamping on the right spot, the head of a huge nail acted as a button, communicating the signal to the inner chamber.

The "NEST," for that was the name by which the place was known to its frequenters, was nothing more or less than a large room, dug bodily out of the solid earth, and was absolutely inaccessible when the tide was high, there being no means of entrance or exit, except the one already described. Now and then, in digging the place out, large rocks, and ledges of rock had been met with, and the men had dug around these, finally creating one of the most strangely constructed apartments imaginable. A narrow shaft, not larger than a man's leg, ran from the roof to the open air above for the purpose of ventilation.

The room itself was about forty feet one way, by twenty, or twenty-five the other, and two-thirds of its flooring was formed by an immense flat rock, placed there by dame nature. This was thickly strewn with carpeting and rugs of a hundred different patterns, sizes and values, the product of many a theft and forage, although the inmates of this place were neither thieves nor burglars by profession. Yet the "Nest" had been the refuge of many an escaped criminal, and when once they knew the means of entrance, they were sure to come again, and now and then, brought some trifle to help beautify and make the place comfortable.

In fact, since the establishment of the working paraphernalia at Gleebe Mountain, the "Nest"—which had formerly been the counterfeiter's work-room, had come to be used for nothing more than a rendezvous and quasi store-room for them, or as a place of escape for those who happened to be hotly pursued by the police.

When Captain Quickkeye stepped into the room he found half a dozen men there, lounging around on the cushions and rugs, smoking their pipes and evidently enjoying life.

The disguise which he wore was unknown to them, and one and all rose to their feet, surprised to see a stranger in their midst, yet, since he knew the secret of getting in, willing to give him an opportunity of explaining who he was.

Three of the men were strangers to him, and he chose to preserve his *incognito* for a while, so when one of them asked him his name, he gave the secret sign to his three men and replied generally:

"Never mind my name. I'm here, and that's enough."

"But we want yer name."

"Call me Bill, for short."

"Where yer from?"

"York."

"Wanted?"

"Rather."

"What fur?"

"Crackin' a skull."

"How long ye goin' ter stay?"

"Till I get ready to go."

"Say, pardy, yer rather fresh fur an' old 'un, ain't yer?"

The speaker and the man who had put all the questions, was a tall, raw-boned six-footer, with a cruel face, heavy jaws, low, animal-like forehead and snaky eyes. He stood all the time he was talking immediately in front of Quickkeye, and put on an insolent air that showed he meant to run the place if he could.

"By what authority do you question me, sir?" asked the captain, rather incensed at the tone which the other took.

"None o' yer business, old 'un; I'm axin' questions, an' ef yer don't want yer phiz spiled, yer'd better answer." He reached out his hand and grasped the counterfeiter chief by the shoulder. "What's yer handle? Give us yer full name, or I'll smash ye!"

Quickkeye's other arm shot out like a rocket, his fist catching the bully square between the eyes, and he went down like a stricken bullock. He endeavored to regain his feet, but another blow, this time from the butt of a pistol knocked him senseless.

The three who knew who their visitor was had stepped forward to interfere when the big fellow had placed his hand on the captain, but the scene described was enacted instantly, and be-

fore they could say or do a thing. The other two were off in a corner together with drawn revolvers scarcely knowing what action to take in the matter, but when Quickeye struck the fallen man with his weapon, they both sprung forward to take part in the fray.

"Back!" cried Quickeye, leveling his pistol at one of them. "Back, or I'll bore you through!" and just as he was about to carry out his threat, the three friends of the captain leaped forward, and in a moment the two belligerents were disarmed.

"This comes of allowing every cursed cracksmen in the city to come here," said Quickeye, scowling darkly. "Wash the paint off that fellow's face," pointing to the senseless man on the floor, "pull the false beard off his chin, and then chuck some water on him, and bring him to. You're all a set of infernal idiots not to see that he was disguised."

Presently the stricken man opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he asked, feebly.

"Where you have tried for years to get," answered Quickeye, "but in a place you will find still more difficult to leave. The ten thousand dollar racket has lured several of your crowd to death, but you happen to be the first victim; the others will come."

"Who are you? What do you mean?"

"I am the man you sought to betray, Mr. Ex-Cracksmen, and present self-created detective, and I mean that you will be food for fishes in about an hour's time," and the counterfeiter smiled wickedly.

"Curse you!" cried the man, trying to get up, but falling back again, helpless. "Anyhow, you will not escape, for at midnight there will be a posse of police on the pier, waiting for you to come out. Ha, ha, ha! Mr. Quickeye, you have your choice—stay here and starve, or go out—to Sing Sing. Now do your worst!"

"Trapped!" cried Quickeye, starting back in dismay. "Trapped like a rat in a cage!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE "NEST."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the fellow derisively, after the men had tightly pinioned him, and taken his weapons away. "You have got me down, Captain Quickeye, the great counterfeiter chief, but all the same I've euchered you, and when you go out of here, you'll walk right into the arms of about a dozen cops, and the State will pay your railroad fare up the Hudson."

"Who are you?" said Quickeye.

"Don't you wish you knew?" replied the man, laughing sardonically.

"I think I do, though I'm by no means certain."

"Who am I, then, since you know so much?"

"I think you are Jay Blucher, better known as Blue Jay, the fellow who, a couple of years ago, gave a certain detective, named Daniel Bertrand, such a long chase, and came near doing away with him finally; an ex-convict, ex-cracksmen, ex-murderer, ex-everything that is crooked, who never lost an opportunity of betraying a pal, and giving him up to justice, if you could make a dollar or secure your own freedom by doing so; that is who I think you are, and if I am right, you have come just where you are wanted, for these men here will give you your just deserts."

"Blue Jay!" yelled the men, "prove that he is Blue Jay, and we'll make him sorry he ever lived to see this night!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Bah! How can he prove it?"

"How?" said Quickeye. "I'll tell you. When Blue Jay came so near stopping the detective's breath, he received a wound himself, the scar of which should remain."

"Bah!" cried the man, with a show of bravado, but growing pale nevertheless, "that proves nothing. I am covered with scars from head to foot!"

"That scar, I believe, is on your body."

"Where?" cried the men.

"On his right breast!"

"It is a lie—an infernal lie!" roared the culprit.

"Anyhow, we'll see!" cried the men, springing forward and seizing him.

"Stay!" ordered the captain, as the men were about to tear the clothes from the struggling prisoner. "Let me first describe it, that there be no mistake."

The men paused and waited anxiously.

"It is the stab of a two-tined fork in the right breast. It was a glancing blow, cutting two distinct gashes, which must have healed separately. Now look!"

In an instant the men seized him, dragged him to the center of the room, and fairly tore the clothes from his back, despite his cursing and swearing, and protesting that it was not there, but when the breast was laid bare, sure enough there were two distinct scars about an inch and a half in length, running in parallel lines on the right breast.

Blue Jay's face was a sight to behold when his identity was thus established. Fear, hatred, passion of all kinds strove for supremacy there, distorting his features, and causing the cold sweat to stand out in beads on his forehead. He writhed like a snake under the heel of a boot,

and his eyes glistened like the eyes of a serpent ready to strike.

With one mighty effort he burst the bonds that held him, for he was a powerful man, leaped to his feet, and before any one realized that he was free, he had wrenched a revolver from the hand of one of the men and retreated to a corner, where he stood at bay, ragged, disheveled, bleeding, and crazed with anger and fear.

"Curse you!" he cried, covering Quickeye with the weapon he held, "who are you that knows all this? Who are you that knows Bertrand's secrets?"

"Shoot him, one of you," was the counterfeiter's reply, spoken coldly, and with no evidence of fear in his voice, although a pistol, which he knew to be loaded, was pointed almost directly at his heart. "Shoot him, but don't kill him; save him for the boys."

"Shoot me, will you?" yelled Blue Jay, and he pulled the trigger, and almost simultaneously with the report of the weapon he held, came the explosion of another, for one of the men had obeyed the captain's order, and fired, the ball striking the ex-convict in the right arm, while strange to say, Quickeye remained standing, unharmed.

The men sprung forward as soon as the two shots were fired, to throw themselves upon the desperate man, and once more make him a prisoner, but Blue Jay was too quick for them, for he stooped and grasped the pistol, which had fallen upon the floor when the ball struck him in his left hand, and before the men could reach him, he had placed the muzzle to his own breast and once more fired.

"I'll cheat you out of torturing me, anyhow!" he gasped, writhing in his death-agonies. "It is better to die this way, than the death you would give me, curse you, curse you all. I hope I killed that Quickeye, curse—" a gush of blood from his mouth prevented his finishing the sentence.

"Sorry to disappoint you, but you didn't shoot straight enough," said the captain, stepping forward. "You have done a better job for yourself."

"I never missed before," gurgled the dying man.

"Yes you did—once," said Quickeye.

"Bertrand, and—you," he gasped, writhing in pain. "The two—men—I—most hate—curse you—cur—curse—ah!"

He was dead.

"Now, who are these other fellows?" asked the captain, scowling at them, and addressing his ownmen, but he was very readily satisfied that they were all right, being harmless thieves, who had escaped from station-houses, and were in hiding until their last offense should be forgotten.

The all-important question of getting out of the "nest" was next to be considered, for if Blue Jay had spoken the truth, and there was a posse of police keeping guard on the pier, the only exit was closed, and the means of escape cut off.

"There is only one way for it, that I can see," said Bank-Note Bill, after reflecting a few moments. "We certainly must get out of here somehow, and I don't at all relish the idea of being captured either."

"What do you suggest?" asked one of the men. "How can we get out?"

"Fight our way," replied the chief.

"But some of us are sure to be captured."

"What of that? It is as likely to be I as you. Let each man take his chance and look out only for himself."

"O. K., captain; give us yer programme!" cried another of the men, a fellow who looked as though he rather liked the idea of a scrimmage.

"You and I, Burke," addressing the last speaker, "will lead the way, the others following close behind us. We will go through the cribs quietly, and when we are all together, underneath the trap, two of the men will work it very quickly, and we will spring out upon the pier; the others will follow as closely behind us as they can, and when once on the pier, as I said before, let each man look out for himself and get away if he can—but mind, no squealing if one of you happen to be taken. You all know how to find me afterward if the city gets too hot for you."

"Good!" cried Burke. "Come ahead!"

"Fool!" said the captain. "Don't you know that there is evidence enough here to trace the whole lot of us? This place must be finally abandoned to-night," and he took a key from his pocket, and unlocked a large chest, displaying a huge pile of greenbacks of all denominations.

"If any of you want any of this stuff, take it, for I'm going to burn the rest," he said, striking a match and igniting a newspaper which he took from his pocket.

Without exception they all sprung forward and began cramming their pockets with the bills.

"Better be careful," admonished Quickeye, "it's all 'queer,' and if any of you are caught with it in your pockets, it will go a good deal harder with you," but they paid no heed, and when each man had helped himself sufficiently,

not a dollar was left to be burned, and so he merely took a few papers from the bottom of the chest, and thrust them into his coat.

He then began to unwind a coil of peculiar-looking string, and after boring a hole with an auger, in a twelve-pound keg of powder, placed one end of the coil through it, carrying the other through the entrance, past the huge stone, out into the hallway.

"It will take that fuse exactly thirty minutes to burn, my men," he said, "and when once we have left this place, there will be no retreat for us, for if we come back here, we will be blown up, and buried in the same grave with Blue Jay; are you ready?"

"We are!" answered the men, hoarsely, realizing that they were leaving death behind them, only to face a deadly peril.

"Then look to your arms, and follow! Come, Burke, follow me."

One by one they filed through the opening, and when they were all outside the room, the rock was rolled into its place, and Quickeye lighted the end of the fuse.

"Now, men," he said, "in thirty minutes the nest will be blown up, and by that time we must be far enough from here to escape it. Blue Jay put us in this peril, and we must escape the best way we can. Come!" and he led the way toward the pier, Burke keeping close behind him.

Once he paused, as they were passing into the crib underneath the trap, and turning, he whispered, so that the others might not hear:

"When the trap flies open, fire your pistol in the air, leap out after me and dive into the water. The others will follow closely enough to take all the attention of the cops—you understand?"

"I do."

Not a sound could be heard overhead, and for a moment it seemed to Quickeye that he had been hoaxed by Blue Jay; but, even as this thought came to him, a half-suppressed sneeze from some one on the pier broke the silence, and he knew then that it was no trick, but a dread reality.

The planks were raised cautiously about half an inch—just enough to allow him to see seven or eight blue-coated officers sitting on the hull of a skiff that was lying bottom-upward on the pier, and he knew that though there were but a dozen policemen at the most, out on the pier, there were others within easy call.

Silently he let the planks down once more, and striking a sulphur match, glanced at his watch, then quickly blew out the light.

"Now, men," he said, "the nest will blow up in just three minutes. We are far enough away to be safe, but stand ready, and when the explosion comes, leap out."

They waited in breathless suspense, the minutes seeming an eternity. They could almost hear their own hearts beat with the excitement that filled the air they breathed.

Suddenly there was a loud, yet muffled report from the shore, and the hurrying of feet on the pier overhead.

"Now!" cried the counterfeiter.

The planks were dashed aside, and followed by Burke, he sprung upon the pier, firing his revolver rapidly.

The tall form of a police officer confronted him, but his fist shot out like lightning, and the man went down under it like a log.

With one bound he was at the side of the pier, while his five companions were leaping out of the trap.

He paused an instant, as he was about to throw himself into the water, but even as he did so, the man he had knocked down raised his pistol and fired, and with a loud cry, Captain Quickeye fell crashing into the gulf beneath him.

CHAPTER VIII.

"TRICKED—AND BY A BOY."

WE have left our three friends, the detective, Sharp, Green Mountain Joe, and Chipmonk nearly long enough at their luncheon, so now we will go back to them, a retrograde of about twenty-four hours in the chronology of our story.

"It is time we were moving on," said Sharp, when Joe had finished his story.

"Right ye be!" remarked Chipmonk complacently, "but where in blazes ye'r goin' 's mor'n I kin make out. Yer don't call this hunt-in', and yer ain't gunnin' fur sart'in. Say, Joe, whar ye goin', anyhow?"

"Lookin' fur the kaow," replied Joe, glancing sharply at the boy.

"Um! Right ye be—that's jist what I thought. You two fellers'd make a brace o' good calves fur it."

Joe was about to reply sharply, when a warning glance from the detective kept him silent.

"Boy!" said Sharp authoritatively, "have—"

"Mr. Chipmonk's my name, ef you please," said Chipmonk mischievously.

"Have you been much on this mountain?"

"M! Some."

"How much?"

"M!"

"Well—how much?"

"More'n that."

"More than what?"
 "That."
 "Did you ever see anything strange here?"
 "M!"
 "You have."
 "Right ye be!"
 "Very strange?"
 "Awful strange."
 "What was it?"
 "Strangest, queerest thing I ever saw."
 "What was it?"
 "Saw it to-day, too."
 "What was it?"
 "I couldn't 'splain it, ye know, but ye'll 'low it's funny fur these parts."
 "Boy!" exclaimed Sharp, grasping Chipmonk by the collar, "will you, or won't you tell me what you are talking about?"
 "Naw, I won't, unless you take yer hand off my collar."
 "Well," loosing him, "out with it."
 "Out with what?"
 "The strange thing you saw here."
 "Wal, mister, I'm only a boy, but I've see'd some strange things, I hev, and the strangest, most outlandish, onnatu'alest thing I ever see'd in this mounting was—"
 "Well, what?"
 "Sam Sharp, detective! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" and Chipmonk sprung nimbly to one side to avoid the blow aimed at him by Sharp.
 Joe, who had attentively listened to the dialogue, laughed heartily, and then suddenly he began to wonder how Chip knew that Sharp was a detective, and the smile left his face instantly.
 "Say, Chip, haow'd yeou know that Mr. Sharp was a detective?" he asked of the boy.
 "S'pose I'm a fool?" returned the boy. "Guess I kin see through a winder when the glass's knocked out."
 "What do you mean?" asked Sharp.
 "You've been in 'Derry three days, ain't ye?"
 "Yes."
 "Well, ef you'd come here ter hunt, do yer s'pose ye'd laid around three days 'thout gittin' a gun off? I know what ye came here fur."
 "What?" asked the detective.
 "Wal, it's true ye come ter hunt, but not pa'tridges, and sich; you came here to hunt counterfeiters."
 Sharp sprung forward and seized the boy.
 "Tell me how you know that?" he said between his teeth.
 "I do know it, an' thet's enough," replied the boy doggedly.
 "Tell me!" cried Sharp, shaking Chip roughly. "How did you know there was such a thing as a counterfeiter here?"
 "Didn't!"
 "Then what did you mean by that remark?"
 "Nothin'!"
 "Chipmonk, you will have to answer my questions," said Sharp in a firm tone, and keeping his hold on the boy's collar. "I begin to think that you know a great deal more than you appear to, and I want to force you to tell all you know, if you will voluntarily give me the benefit of your knowledge, you will be none the worse off for it."
 Chip looked up at him fearlessly.
 "Mister Sharp, he said, "ef you hold me here 'til I'm gray—ef you shake me 'til my teeth drop out, you'll never force me to say a thing I don't want'r."
 The detective let him go.
 "Come," he said, "tell me what you know."
 "I'll tell you what I'll do."
 "Well—what?"
 "Ef Joe'll stay right here 'til we come back, an' you'll go with me," said Chipmonk impressively, "I'll take you to the counterfeiters' cave."
 Sharp bounded forward.
 "Can you do it?" he cried.
 "I kin."
 "When will you?"
 "Now."
 "But, I want ter go too," said Joe, not relishing the disposition made of him.
 "Won't take ye," declared Chipmonk laconically.
 "Why?" asked Joe.
 "Don't want ye; ye'r too big."
 "Joe will wait here for us," said Sharp.
 "He must promise to wait here, an' to keep his dorgs here 'til we git back, or I won't budge," replied the boy. "Will ye promise that, Joe?"
 "I don't see why I can't go," said Joe.
 "I won't take ye; that settles it!"
 "Will you promise to wait here, Joe?" asked the detective.
 "I s'pose so," rather impatiently.
 "Now, Chipmonk," said Sharp sternly, "you are to lead the way, and I will follow, and I warn you, boy though you are, that if I see any signs of foul play on your part, I will shoot you on the spot; are you ready?"
 "I be."
 "Then go ahead—I'll follow. Good-by Joe—wait here for me twelve hours, and if I am not back by that time you will know something has happened to me, and in that case I charge you to write all you know to Police Headquarters in New York. Good-by."

"Good-by," said Joe. "Good-luck to you."
 Chipmonk leading the way, and the detective following, they were soon out of sight in the woods, leaving Joe alone with his dogs.
 For considerably more than an hour Sam Sharp and his youthful guide worked their way through the tangled growth of bushes and young spruce and bal-am until the woods began to grow quite dark.
 Finally they paused in a much denser thicket than any they had yet entered, and Chipmonk turned to his companion.
 "We are almost there," he said, in a whisper. "The cave is only a few rods from here."
 "Do they keep a guard posted?" asked the detective.
 "Up here?" answered the boy. "Do you think thet 'ud be worth while?"
 "Hardly—that is a fact!"
 "All you've got ter do," Chip continued, "is to follow me. When I creep you creep, an' when I stop, you stop, too. I'll give ye fair warnin', Mister Detective, ef them fellows ketch ye in thet air cave, I wouldn't give a pinch o' coal gas fur yer life."
 "I'll take my chances," replied Sharp, bravely. "I must see the inside of that place, so that when I come here with some one behind me as a support, I will know where to lead them."
 "Got yer pop?"
 "Yes, two of them."
 "Handy?"
 "In my coat-pockets—each side—I can get them quick enough."
 "All right; come on!"
 And once more they started through the thicket, going very slowly and cautiously, Chipmonk keeping a few feet in advance of his companion.
 Suddenly the boy dropped upon his hands and knees, Sharp immediately doing likewise, and they crept along for about eighty or a hundred feet, when Chipmonk came to a complete stop, and waited for the detective to come up with him.
 The woods were now so dark that a hand could scarcely be seen immediately in front of one's eyes, although it was starlight overhead.
 In front of the twain there seemed to be an impenetrable wall of blackness—so much blacker than the surrounding darkness that it was discernible.
 "D'ye see that air clump o' bushes?" whispered Chip.
 "Yes," Sharp whispered back, "but I thought it was a rock."
 "Naw, them's bushes, an' right behind 'em's the entrance to the cave. Ef ye want ter back out, now's yer time."
 "But I don't."
 "Ye'r in fur it then?"
 "Yes; I am determined to see the act through."
 "Ye may never come out alive."
 "All the same, I'll go in. If you don't want to go, I'll go alone."
 "Oh, I'm goin' in."
 "Then lead the way."
 "Right ye be—here goes!" and the whispered colloquy ended, Chipmonk once more moving cautiously ahead on his hands and knees, closely followed by the detective.
 Soon they arrived at the clump of bushes, and then they had to lay flat on their bellies and worm their way along like snakes, pushing the bushes aside carefully, to avoid making any unnecessary noise.
 "Sh-h-h!" breathed Chipmonk, softly, "here we are," and Sharp saw something even blacker than the thicket they had just passed through, which he took to be a hole about five feet in diameter, and which was, indeed, the entrance to the counterfeiters' cave.
 "Go ahead," he whispered; "don't stop now."
 Slowly and carefully they worked their way through the opening; Chipmonk dropping back until he was side by side with the detective.
 "Keep one hand on my shoulder," he whispered, as they moved along together; "we want ter know whar ter find each other now."
 "How far have we got to go this way?" asked Sharp, under his breath.
 "Bout fifty feet more. There's a little room off one side thet's never used. We kin go in thar an' strike a light, an' pull ourselves together."
 "Some of the counterfeiters might discover us."
 "No danger o' that; they're all at t'other end playin' cards an' drinkin' hot stuff."
 Again they crept onward. Sharp keeping his hand on the boy, who presently turned abruptly to the right, and he knew that they were in another passageway.
 Suddenly the boy stood upright, and in his natural tone said:
 "Here we be, safe an' sound."
 "Sh-h-h-h!" warned Sharp.
 "No danger now," laughed Chipmonk. "They couldn't hear ye ef ye yelled," and he struck a match, lighting a large lamp that hung suspended from the center of the cavernous room, illumining the place, after the intense darkness they had been in, with a glare equal to electricity.
 The detective's back was half-turned toward

Chipmonk, when he heard two sharp clicks, and he turned suddenly, to see the boy, standing about ten feet from him, pointing two revolvers at his head.

"Put up yer hooks!" commanded the boy guide, coolly. "I've got ther drop on yer with yer own pops thet I borried comin' in, an', by blazes! ef ye so much as wink, I'll let lamp-light through ye—right ye be, my covey!"
 "Tricked," muttered Sharp. "Tricked—and by a boy!"
 "Right ye be!" replied Chip. "Ye see, I held the joker back."

CHAPTER IX. IN THE TOILS.

WHEN Quickeye, uttering a sharp cry, fell with a loud splash into the water, Burke, who was near him, and who supposed of course that he was killed, dove like a kingfisher, thinking that he would swim as far as he could under the surface, thus standing a much better chance of escape.

But ere he had struck the water, he changed his mind and resolved to see whether the captain was killed or not, nor did the effort prove very great, for right by his side was the object sought, feebly struggling for life.

Burke seized him and swam out into the basin, taking care to keep the captain's head above the water.

He had progressed in this way but a short distance when a voice from the pier ordered him to halt.

"Come back here, or I'll put a hole in you!" it shouted, but the gallant fellow made no answer, striving steadily onward with his burden, which, by the way, was fast regaining consciousness.

"Ring!" came the report of a pistol, and the ball struck the water not more than a foot from Burke's head.

"Ping—ping—ping!!!" sounded three reports in rapid succession, and the leaden missiles pattered around them like hail.

"I'm all right now, Burke," said Quickeye at that instant; "let go of me, and I can swim with you. That ball only stunned me I guess."

"Will you come back?" shouted a voice from the pier. "I'll shoot to kill next time."

No answer from the two men in the water, who kept steadily swimming on.

Suddenly the captain saw something dark in the water ahead of them.

"A boat!" he gasped, excitedly. "If there are only oars in it we are all right."

"Ping—ping!" came two reports from the pier, and Burke uttered a little exclamation of pain.

"Hit?" asked Quickeye.

"Yes, a little, not hard—go on, I'm all right."

In another moment they were at the boat, which proved to be a light skiff attached to a small sloop yacht lying near, and as luck would have it, the oars were lying upon the seats ready for instant use.

It was too dark for the men on the pier to see them as they, as noiselessly as possible, clambered into the skiff, but they had scarcely cut the painter which fastened them to the sloop, when they heard the splash of oars in the water behind them, and knew that the police had also found a boat—probably by launching the one on the pier—and were coming in pursuit of them.

"We are in for it now, Burke," said Quickeye, in a hard tone, "but my strength has all come back to me, and we will give those fellows a lively chase before they capture us, anyhow. Where are you hit?"

"The ball struck my shoulder, and went on without doing any damage, beyond plowing a furrow. I'm all right."

"Good! Stretch out in the boat's bottom, and when I get tired you can relieve me," and the counterfeiter chief pulled rapidly away, taking care to dip his oars in the water without splashing.

He pulled straight out for New York Bay, calculating that the police would spend enough time searching for them in the immediate vicinity, to give them an opportunity to escape.

"If the moon will only stay under that cloud fifteen minutes," he thought, "I'll take my chances against the world;" but even as the thought came to him, the cloud began to grow dimmer, and presently the moon rolled from behind it like a ball, shedding a flood of light on the basin.

"Blest if they aren't searching the sloop," said Quickeye.

True enough. By the moon's light he could now plainly see the police boat at the sloop's side, containing two men, while three more were rummaging about her decks, searching for them.

But they were discovered almost at the same moment, by the police, who immediately sprung for their boat and started in hot pursuit, and then began an exciting chase. The clouds, which had been so thick during the rainfall in the early part of the evening, were broken and scattered, but here and there a heavy, ominous bank of them drifted sluggishly along, while the moon, which had come out from behind one of these banks, lit up the water like day.

The fugitives were making straight for the open bay, because there was no other course left open to them, and in following that one, Quickeye well knew that there were only two chances of their escaping the pursuers, either by outrowing and distancing them, which was extremely doubtful, or if the moon should get behind another cloud, by eluding them in the darkness. The latter was really his only hope, for what could one pair of oars accomplish against two?

"We must not be taken!" he muttered between his teeth, settling himself to work with a determination and energy that sent the little skiff skimming over the water like a bird, and being, as it was, very much lighter in build than the pursuing boat, it kept its distance well.

"Burke," said he, after a few moments' silence, during which there was no perceptible change in the space between the two boats, "will your pistol work?"

"I don't know; it's rather wet."

"Well, try it; see if you can't cripple one of those fellows there."

Burke raised himself from the bottom of the boat, and after drawing a large 44-caliber revolver from his pocket, prepared himself to fire it at the pursuers.

"I guess she'll speak," he said, as he leveled it at the bow-oarsman of the other boat; "these are pretty good cartridges, and don't wet through very easily."

"Crack!" spoke the weapon, as he pulled the trigger.

"Well?" said Quickeye, seeing no commotion among the officers. "I guess you missed. No, by Jove! they are changing places. You have either touched that fellow, or he's tired. Here, take my place, quick, while they are changing! It'll wind me a little, and I'll take a chance at them once."

The change was made very quickly, Burke grasping the oars and starting on with a long, powerful stroke, the chief seizing the revolver, and pointing it at the man who had taken the other's place.

"Crack!"

"Good!" cried Burke, immediately after the report of the weapon, as the policeman aimed at dropped his oars and sunk into the bottom of his boat. "I rather guess they'll begin to think we mean business!"

Evidently the officers meant "business," too, for, although there was a slight delay, during which the fugitives gained thirty or forty feet, the fallen man's place was quickly filled, and the pursuers came on relentlessly.

Nor was that all. They also had evidently made up their minds to do a little crippling on their own account, for the report of a revolver in the hand of one of them was closely followed by the striking of a ball against the oar not more than a foot from Burke's hand, but it glanced, and did no damage.

"They are gaining a little now," said Quickeye, coolly, again raising the revolver he held, but he lowered it again, and placing his hands to his mouth, shouted:

"Go back, or we'll kill every mother's son of you!"

"Surrender, for we'll never give up the chase without you!" came the reply.

"You will never take us alive!" shouted the counterfeiter.

"Then we'll take you dead. Pull, men, we'll have 'em yet!"

"Is that final?"

There was a flash in the counterfeiter's eyes, and a ring in his voice when he asked that question, that plainly told he had come to some determination.

"Yes!"

"You will not go back?"

"Yes—by and by, and we'll take you with us, alive or dead."

"Crack!" spoke Quickeye's revolver, and again the oarsman nearest the bow of the pursuing boat dropped his oars, quivered a moment in his place, uttered a sharp cry and fell over the side of the boat, his arms dragging in the water.

"Crack!"

Again sounded the ominous report, before the police had recovered from the surprise and confusion of the preceding shot, and the second oarsman sprung to his feet, tottered a moment, and then fell bodily over the gunwale into the bay.

"Crack!"

The third report rung out a second later, and the only officer remaining who had not been wounded, reeled and fell upon one of the seats, groaning with pain.

It may seem almost incredible that this could be accomplished without a return shot being fired, but Captain Quickeye was a marksman who never missed his aim with a revolver, and he held in his hand one of those self-cocking repeaters, which were then somewhat of a curiosity, but are now very common.

The three shots that marked such fearful havoc among the officers were fired within two seconds of each other and the effect, as the reader knows, was fearful.

Fate seemed to play into the hands of that desperate man, for at almost the same instant that

the third shot was fired, the moon went behind a heavy bank of clouds, and almost immediately the water was covered with a veil of intense darkness.

The little skiff containing the two fugitives shot onward through the blackness of the night, and not a sound but the splashing of the oars, and the pattering of the rain-drops which had begun to fall again, could be heard.

Once a little tug boat nearly ran them down, but they happened to see their danger in time and so escaped, rowing steadily on until at last, after a long, hard and steady pull, the boat approached Communipaw on the Jersey shore.

"Burke," said Captain Quickeye, who was rowing at the time, resting on his oars, and allowing the skiff to float with the tide, when they were nearly to the place of landing, "I am not unmindful of the fact that you have saved both life and liberty for me to-night, and, while I never forget nor forgive an injury, neither do I allow myself to neglect an obligation of this kind."

"That's all right," replied Burke, "you'd have done the same for me."

"Even so; that does not lessen the obligation. Is there any favor I can do for you?"

"Yes, there is—one."

"Name it; if it is in my power, I will do what you ask."

"It is certainly in your power."

"What is it?"

Burke hesitated a moment before replying, but being again assured by Quickeye that he need have no hesitation in asking anything he wished, he said:

"Captain, you have known me but a very short time."

"True, but that makes no difference."

"In fact, you never saw me but once before."

"True again."

"You know absolutely nothing concerning me, except that in a fit of passion, a few months ago, I shot and killed a man in a bar-room in Houston street."

"Well, what of it?"

Burke bent forward, and lowered his voice.

"Do you think you know enough of me to trust me—in short, to make me a member of your organization?" he asked.

"Is that all?" replied the counterfeiter. "I thought from your hesitation that you were going to demand some overwhelming favor of me, in payment of the obligation which I owe you."

"That is all," said Burke. "I have for some time possessed a great desire to become one of your organization. Will you take me?"

For a moment Quickeye was silent in his turn.

"Burke, what I am going to say to you now, may sound very strange, coming from me," he said, finally, "but I suppose there is a soft side to every man's character, no matter how hard he may appear to others. If, after I have done talking, you still desire to go with me to the cavern and to become one of us, you may do so."

"I am listening," replied Burke.

"As you say," continued Quickeye, "all that I know of you is that you have killed a man, and that I was fortunate enough to offer you shelter, but I think a great deal more."

"What?"

"I think—I believe that to be the only really wrong act you would have to answer for, were you called to judgment to-night. You need not answer; no man is obliged to criminate himself, and anyway, I am going to proceed on that hypothesis."

"As near as I can judge, you are about twenty-five years old, muscular, brave, and above all, well educated. You have a face, and a tongue which would carry you anywhere, into any society. Think twice, my dear boy, before you adopt the path I tread. If I had thought twice, when I was your age, and that was not very long ago either, I would not now be an outcast, a felon, and a murderer. I possessed then, the many qualities which you have now, and if I had chosen to turn them to good instead of evil, to-day I would be respected among my fellow-men, and what is yet more important, would have respected myself. But I chose the crooked path; I went from bad to worse, stopping at no crime, hesitating at no sin. My boy, I like you; there is something in your face that reminds me of other days, when I was what I would have you be; there is a brightness in your smile, and a ring in your hearty voice that brings up—though why, I know not—a face that should have made me a better man; that makes me long to change places with you, and live my life over again from the age of twenty-five. I have one more word to say to you, and I am done. Listen to me now!"

He paused, and drew his hand across his brow, meditatively, sadly.

"Burke," he continued, "the life of a man in my position is worse than the hell of the middle ages, no rest for the present, no hope for the future. I arise in the morning and wish it was night, and when night comes, I long for dawn; whichever way I turn, there stands the skeleton Conscience, leering at me in silent horror, while

the specter of wrong-doing beckons me on to eternal ruin. Boy—boy! you have yet time to draw back. Do not enter the charnel-house of crime, reeking with the stench of self-degradation! Stop where you are! If you are short of funds, I will gladly give you the necessary means to take you to another country, where you can live a new life, honorable, upright and just, winning the respect of all mankind, and doing simple justice to the God that created you. Do this, my boy, and I will feel that at least there is one good deed recorded opposite my name on the great book of Fate. Fly from crime, because a criminal asks it!"

A full moment of absolute silence.

"Do you say this to me—you?" asked Burke in a husky tone.

"Yes, I—I!"

"Who, then, are you?"

"I am what I have proclaimed myself—a criminal—an outcast—nothing more."

Again there was a silence, during which Quickeye once more picked up the oars, and with sharp strokes drove the skiff toward the Jersey shore.

The rain was still falling softly, but notwithstanding, the moon peeped out from behind the clouds, seeming to smile down upon the one good deed of the counterfeiter chief, as he pulled the boat swiftly along through the dark waters.

They neared the wharves, and directed their course for one of the piers, that seemed in the darkness to afford better facilities for landing.

"Do not answer me to-night," said Quickeye, at last. "Think it well over, and we will speak of it again in the morning."

In a moment more the boat touched the pier, and after making her fast, they sprung upon the dock, but they had scarcely planted their feet firmly upon the planking, when the brilliant light of a bull's-eye lantern dazzled their eyes, and a gruff voice said to them:

"Surrender! You are prisoners!"

And there, holding lanterns and pointing revolvers at their heads, stood three policemen.

There was no chance of escape—nothing to do but surrender.

CHAPTER X.

TWO ENDS TO A CLEW.

UPON the morning following Vera Preston's visit at Police Headquarters, the inspector was very much surprised by receiving the following note:

"DEAR SIR:—I have already discovered a clew which will take me out of the city at once, and therefore prevent my filling the engagement with you. As soon as possible, however, I will report to you, but I have an idea that then my work will be done and my mission accomplished. I fortunately have sufficient funds on hand to meet my expenses for at least a month, and I feel confident in predicting that by that time I will be able to deliver the notorious counterfeiter into your hands. In the interval, I wish merely to request that you will not think me mad, but deem me only a woman, who has her own ends to gain, as well as yours. I am sure that by the time you see me again, I will have given you cause to look with respect upon the name of

"VERA PRESTON."

The worthy inspector read the note over several times, smiled, shook his head, frowned, and finally gave it up, remarking *sotto voce*:

"A woman will puzzle the devil, let alone an Inspector of Police."

The train that stopped at Chester, Vermont, the following morning deposited but two passengers on the depot platform. One was a woman about forty years of age, whose bright corkscrew curls exhibited here and there a gray hair, struggling for notice, having escaped the ravages of restoratives. Her eyes were evidently weak, for she wore large smoked glasses over them, and her dress had evidently been designed by a refugee from the immortal Mayflower, so primitive was its style. In one hand she carried an old weather-worn sachel, large enough to hold the wardrobe of a city belle, and in the other an umbrella that might have kept the head of Noah dry during the deluge, if he had not had the Ark to shelter him.

The other passenger was none other than Daniel Bertrand.

For a moment the lady of uncertain age looked wonderingly about her, and then espying her fellow traveler, she hastily approached him.

"I beg your pardon, sir," she said, in a sharp, quick, jerky tone, and speaking, as Bertrand inwardly remarked, horribly through her nose, "but I am right, ain't I? This here place is Chester, isn't it?"

"Yes, madame—" began Bertrand, but an exclamation of indignation from the female, followed by her sachel dropping almost on his toes, brought him to a sudden stop.

"Don't!" she said. "For mercy's sake, don't!"

"Don't what?" he asked in surprise.

"Don't call me madame. I never was quite such a fool as to tie myself to some villain of a man, who might be eternally courtin' other girls and leavin' me home to mend his clothes. No, sir, I'm miss, and always will be, I hope."

"I'm sure I hope so, too, mad— that is, miss," said Bertrand, wickedly.

"Yes—miss—that's right—Miss Jenkins. You

see, sir, the folks said I was beginnin' to look kind o' peaked, and so they jest put my things together and packed me off up here to Vermont to reconvert, and I was so afraid I had got off at the wrong station that I didn't know what to do. I am right, ain't I? This is Chester, ain't it? Yes? I'm so glad, for I should have felt dreadfully to have got to the wrong place somehow. Do you know, I'm all mixed up about another thing, and if you'd be so kind as to help me out, I'd never forget it—never! You see, I've forgot the name of the place near here where I was to go—they wrote for board and lodgin' for me somewhere, you know, and gave me the directions how to get there, all written down, but somehow or other I've up and lost it, and now I don't know where I am goin'."

"How can I help you?" he managed to say, while she was catching her breath.

"If you'll take the trouble to name over two or three places around here, maybe I'll recollect the name when I hear it. You see—"

"Was it Weston?" asked Bertrand, breaking in desperately.

"No, that ain't it," shaking her head dubiously.

"Landgrove?"

"No—no—that ain't it neither."

"Clarkville—Peru—Holly?"

"No—tain't none of them. Where are you goin' that might be it, you know. Wouldn't it be funny though if we should both be goin' to the same place, and wouldn't it be lucky—that I met you?"

"Very. Unfortunately, however, I am not going to any town, though I go some little distance over toward Londonderry—"

"Londonderry! that's it! ain't that splendid! hum! how girlish of me to forget it too. Londonderry! Londonderry! You see I don't mean to forget it again."

"I am glad to have been of any service to you Mad—Miss Pumpkins—"

"Jenkins, man!"

"Ah, yes, Jenkins—excuse me. I will have to leave you now, as I am in a great hurry. Good-day, Miss Jenkins."

"Good-by Mister—Mister—" but while she was waiting for him to supply the blank, he turned and strode rapidly away.

The woman's eyes sparkled behind her glasses and she murmured to herself in an inaudible tone:

"I wonder if he told me the truth—if he goes toward Londonderry? Where is that place anyhow, and how is one to get there?"

Just as she asked herself the question, a man, carrying a huge whip, approached her.

"Stage, ma'am?" he asked.

"I'm goin' to Londonderry," she replied. "If your stage will take me there, yes."

"Twill; which do you want—North or South 'Derry?"

"Eh? North or South 'Derry! are there two Londonderrys?"

"Yes'm—North and South."

"Dear me! I am so bothered I don't know what to do, and now there are two Londonderrys staring me in the face after I had so much trouble findin' out where I was goin' before. Do you know, sir, if it hadn't been for that gentleman goin' there," pointing at Bertrand who was about a hundred feet away from them and walking rapidly toward the hotel, "I think I should have been lost entirely. I will never forget his kindness, never, never! Can you tell me who he is, Mr. Stageman? I've a great curiosity to know."

"That?" said the driver, looking after him. "Oh, yes, certainly, I know him well—that is, as well as anybody 'round here does. His name's Holt—"

"Holt! pardon me, Mr. Driver, but I had a very dear friend once by that name—but he is dead—go on please, and while you are telling me we may as well be gettin' along nigh the stage."

"Yes, certainly, to-be-sure, ma'am. As I was sayin', his name's Holt—that is, his last name—I dunno the fu'st one, an' two or three years ago he came up here and bought an old haouse an' twenty acres of woodland lyin' long the east side of Glebe Mountain, an' he fitted the place up and I guess he spends most of his time shootin', or fishin' or sich like."

"Have you ever been to his place?"

"No, nor any one else that I know of. He brought his own people to do his work for him, an' I guess Chipmonk's the only one as b'longs in 'Derry as ever goes to his place; come to think of it though, Chipmonk don't b'long here any more'n he does."

"Who's Chipmonk, mister?"

"Well, madam—"

"I ain't madam—I'm miss—Miss Jenkins."

"Excuse me—Miss Jenkins. I don't know no more about Chipmonk than I do about Mister Holt. Neither of 'em wasn't raised in these parts, and we don't think we know much about a person here unless we knew his grandfather and grandmother. Got a trunk, Miss Jenkins? Only that satchel, eh? Well, whereabouts shall I take you when we reach 'Derry? Do you want to stop in the village or where?"

"Is there a hotel, there?"

"Yes; it don't 'maount to much, though."

"Well, take me there, and I'll hire somebody to take me when I get ready ter go further."

They were soon driving along the beautiful road leading through "Chester street" toward 'Derry, and it was nearly supper-time when Miss Jenkins was deposited upon the steps of the apology for a hotel of which the village boasted.

She had partaken of the evening meal and was seated comfortably upon the narrow stoop, when Chipmonk sauntered carelessly by, whistling a lively air.

"Here, boy!" cried Miss Jenkins; "come here a minute, will you? That's right! I thought you looked like an obliging boy when I saw you goin' along. What is your name?"

Chipmonk stared at her curiously for a full minute before replying, and then said laconically:

"Chipmonk!"

"Chipmonk, eh? I thought so. I made sure you was that boy, Chipmonk, when I saw you goin' along, an' that's why I called you. How old are you, Chipmonk? Now you don't look to be more'n twelve or thirteen at first pop, and yet when I look at you again, you look about twenty. How old are you boy?"

"Goin' on sixteen, I guess," replied Chip, again regarding his interlocutor curiously. "Wot d'ye want with me, anyhow? I don't git my livin' by stan'in' around answering a lot o' useless questions popped by some one as ain't concerned in 'em anyhow."

"How do you get your living?"

"Odd jobs, an' gunnin'."

"What's gunnin'?"

The boy turned and started away.

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Miss Jenkins. "I've got an odd job for you to do to help you earn your living; that's what I called you for. I was askin' you a lot of questions simply because I wanted to see if you could do it. You can, can't you? Well, anyhow, I'll try you. You'll come, won't you? Oh, yes, I know you will. You said you done odd jobs, didn't you? Well this 'ere's the oddest job you ever did. You'll come here to-morrow morning, won't you? What time 'll you come, eh?"

"Say, miss," said the boy slowly, "do you want me ter go back an' answer all the questions as ye put 'em, or jest the last one?"

"Just the last one."

"Well, then, I'll come any time you set fur me."

"Seven o'clock."

"Key-rect! What sort of a job is it?"

"Easy—very easy."

"And you think I can do it?"

"I don't know, but you're the most likely one around here. You can try, anyway, can't you? You said you'd be here at seven, didn't—"

"Good-night, miss," cried the boy, starting abruptly away before she had time to finish, and as he went along he muttered:

"Her gab's too much fur me. She pops a question at a feller, an' then grabs the answer afore you git it rolled around into shape, and hauls it right outen your mouth quicker'n a woodchuck gits in his hole. I wonder wot she wants of me. Maybe she jest wants me to sit an' listen while she chins. That's odd enough, only 'tain't very easy."

And Miss Jenkins turned away and went to her room, where presently the corkscrew curls and glasses were laid aside, revealing the beautiful features of Vera Preston.

CHAPTER XI.

OUTWITTING THE COPS.

CAPTAIN QUICKKEYE'S keen intelligence and constant presence of mind told him at once that the officers on the pier at Communipaw where he and Burke attempted to make a landing could not be looking for them, and he felt sure that they were accosted by the policemen entirely from mistaken identity. The representatives of the law had unquestionably been expecting somebody, and had held them up, thinking they had found the right parties.

A few moments more sufficed to confirm him in that conclusion, for he plainly heard one of the blue-coats say to another:

"I thought you said there were four of them; here are only two."

"That's so," returned the officer spoken to. "Maybe we've got the wrong ones. Never mind, it's a find, anyhow."

By that time Quickkeye and Burke were upon the pier, the former having decided just what to say to the officers.

"Good-evening," he said, as pleasantly as though he had just entered a ball-room, instead of clambered, wet and dripping, upon a pier in New York Harbor in the dead of night; "I am very glad that we have found you here so opportunely, for I am in considerable trouble."

The sergeant in charge of the police seemed rather taken aback for an instant, but inquired sharply:

"What is the matter?"

"I am the owner of the sloop yacht Minerva, lying off Conger's stores, in the Erie Basin," said Quickkeye, complacently, "and my friend here and myself were sleeping on board to-night, preparatory to starting on a cruise in the morning."

"About three-quarters of an hour ago, four men boarded us, and before we knew it they were in the cabin. Not thinking they would

find any one there, they made considerable noise, and awoke my friend here, who grappled with one of them. To make a long story short, we made a desperate fight, my friend here being wounded in the arm, and I getting a slight scratch on the head. I think we laid out a couple of them after they began the chase."

"You don't mean to say they followed you?"

"Indeed they did! We took to the boat and rowed away as quickly as we could, thinking we would land on the Brooklyn shore and get assistance, but they pursued us so hotly that we were forced to row all the way here, only eluding them when the moon went down behind a cloud not long ago. They can't be far distant now."

"There were four of them, you say?"

"Yes, four."

"One of them a great big fellow with bushy whiskers?"

"Precisely. Larger than any two of his companions I should think."

"The very fellow we are waiting for. Rest easy, sir, we'll get 'em before dawn."

"If you do," said Quickkeye, "I'll give you two hundred dollars to divide between you. My name is Dunkirk, and I can be found at the Pierpont House, Brooklyn, at any time, if you should want me for a witness, or should earn the reward. Let me see! yes, I have some. Here is something to spur you all up in the mean time," and he handed a twenty-dollar bill the sergeant. "I see it is only a few steps to the ferry," he continued; "can we get a boat at this time of night?"

"Yes, one leaves very soon, now; you will have to hurry to catch it."

With a hasty word of thanks, Quickkeye started away, closely followed by Burke, and they were fortunate in just reaching the boat before it left the ship.

Once upon the boat they both felt safe, for they remained out upon the wagon-deck, where it was dark enough, so that their wet clothes, etc., would not attract too much attention.

"Captain," said Burke, "you are a wonderful man."

"For outwitting others—perhaps I am; but not good for much else."

"Where are you going now?"

"Back to my men."

"What is to become of me? If I am recognized, I will be taken instantly for that affair in Houston street. What am I to do?"

"Can't you disguise yourself? Absolute boldness is the best measure for you to adopt."

"Tell me how; you know I am a novice."

"Shave off your mustache; adopt a pair of eye-glasses and a silk hat, and put up at one of the hotels for a time, and then take a voyage to Europe. You have got money enough, haven't you? If not, I'll let you have some."

"Oh, yes; I have money enough, but I can't live with such a weight on my head, and I would not be any safer in Europe than here, you know. Won't you take me with you?"

"What—to the cave?"

"Yes—to the cave."

"After what I said to you in the boat? I thought you would give more heed to my words, Burke."

"You don't understand me," replied Burke. "I did not mean for you to take me there as one of your organization, but as a friend; a companion; to a place of safety until I can decide what to do. I would not ask this but that I know you have a great deal of confidence in me."

"Yet, Burke, you ask a great deal."

"Is it too much?"

"I am afraid it is, but I will think about it. In the mean time, for in any case I will not leave town before to-morrow night, you must find a way to take care of yourself, for I cannot keep you with me while in town; that is out of the question."

"Then how will I see you to-morrow?"

"Tell me where you will be, and I will meet you if I decide to take you with me; if not, I will send you word."

By that time the boat had reached the New York shore, and the two men quickly passed through the gates, and having agreed upon a place of meeting for the following afternoon, parted company there.

As Quickkeye walked up the street he could not help wondering whether he had acted wisely in placing so much confidence in Burke.

What he knew of him could be told in a very few words. A man had been killed in a bar-room brawl in Houston street one night not very long before, and Burke was the man who, according to the published descriptions and his own declaration, was wanted for the job.

He had been sent to the "Nest" for safety by one of the frequenters of that former snug hiding-place, and Quickkeye, who happened to be there when he made his first appearance, had taken a liking to him and rather cultivated him on account of his fine abilities, thinking he might prove a valuable acquisition to the gang which he controlled.

But notwithstanding the fact that he really liked Burke, there was ever present a something which made him fear that he had trusted him too far.

As for Burke, when he left his companion, he strode along a little way, and then paused and watched Quickeye as he hurried along.

"He is truly a wonderful man," he muttered. "If his talents had only been turned to other account than that of defrauding his fellow-men, what a perfect success he would have been. It is true, as he says, that I ought to pause before linking my fate with his. Could I ever forgive myself after what he has said to me to-night? I do not know what to do, or what to say, but one thing is clear: I must decide before he meets me to-morrow, for if I ever go with him to the cavern as he calls it, there will be but one course for me to pursue and that will be the one against which he advises me, and which there is no denying will be anything but pleasant for me to follow."

On the following morning Quickeye dispatched a note to Burke at the place of rendezvous which ran as follows:

"MY DEAR BURKE:—

"New complications have arisen by which I am forced to leave town at once without keeping my appointment with you, and I am therefore forced to leave you in doubt as to my decision upon the question you asked me last night. I will, however, be here again in less than a week, and will then leave word for you to meet me. Trusting that you will be enabled to avoid any unpleasant results from past experiences, I am sincerely your friend,

"CAP."

Then he took the morning train for Vermont, where he wanted to be alone and think.

We saw him as he left the train and was accosted by Vera Preston in disguise.

The meshes of the net being so rapidly woven around him were growing smaller and smaller, with less and less chance for him to escape; this man who had ever been so keen in outwitting others, was, in his turn, being outwitted, just as the inevitable rule governing crime reveals the true criminal at last, rendering him up to justice as inexorably as the shadows of night fall over and engulf the brightness of day.

Sooner or later the time arrives when caution no longer avails and then comes the bitter finale when the wrong-doer reaps the sure harvest of retribution and dishonor.

CHAPTER XII.

BRIBERY—THE FIGHT BEGINS.

We left Sam Sharp in rather an unpleasant predicament, having found himself badly tricked by the boy Chipmonk, who had taken his revolvers from him and presented them at their owner's head.

What to do, he did not know; that he was in Chipmonk's power, and that the seeming young traitor would carry out his threat if any show of opposition was made, he did not for a moment doubt.

The only thing possible for him to do under the circumstances, he felt, was to bribe the boy; to use his love for gain to carry out the detective's ends; and after the first fury at finding himself so neatly trapped had subsided, he said:

"Chipmonk, do you want to earn a great deal of money?"

"Right ye be!" replied the boy.

"Many hundreds of dollars?"

"Many what?"

"Hundreds of dollars; say ten of them; that would make a thousand, you know."

"Right ye be! Think I don't know how to count? What ye drivin' at, anyhow?"

"If you will do what I want you to do, I will give you a thousand dollars."

"A hull thousand?"

"Yes—ten hundred."

"What d'ye want, eh?"

"First, I want you to give me back those revolvers, then we will talk of the other things."

"Say, Mister Sharp, do I look like a fool? Would you pick me up for one if ye passed me on th' street, eh? Ye jist drive right on past the hull lot of things ye want done, and then I'll tell ye what I'll do and what I won't, and ye can pay accordin'. That's square, ain't it?"

Sam bit his lips in perplexity. He saw that the boy was not to be duped by fair words and promises.

"Chip!" he said decisively, "what I want is this: 'I came up here to gobble the whole gang of counterfeiters who live on this mountain, and I'm bound to do it or leave my bones here, one or the other. Now, I don't believe you are one of the counterfeiters, although I do think you know all about them, and probably have access to their headquarters without question."

"W'ot's that! Access?eh?"

"I mean that you can go and come as you like."

"Right ye be, my covey! Betcher life I kin!"

"Well, I want you to help me to get the drop on them."

"To gobble the hull caboodle?"

"Exactly."

"How ye goin' to do it?"

"Why, I'll simply bring enough men here to capture them, that's all."

The boy grinned broadly.

"Mr. Sharp," he said, "ye ain't half so sharp

as yer name. Do you s'pose ye could git anywhere near this 'ere cave 'thout the boss knowin' it? Not muchy!"

"What do you mean?"

"Jist this. Ef I had the thousand you'r' guffin about, I'd bet it against an old pewter spoon 'thout any handle that every mother's son of the fellows know that you and Joe and me are on the mountain, and I'd bet it all over again that they know what we are after, too; leastwise what you are. They tried to scare Joe out of comin' here once, by fixin' up ther big cow he told ye about, but Joe didn't scare w'ith a cent, and that dorg of his killed one of the men, so they jest thought they'd let him alone, as he didn't come here very often, and didn't do no harm when he did; but, allee samee, they know every time he is on the mountain, and they keep their eye on him till he goes away too."

"They must keep a sharp lookout."

"Not very. There's only two or three places where you could get on the mountain anyway, an' they watch 'em, an' when anybody comes, it's reported at once."

"Then they know I am here. Do they know who I am?"

"They're pretty good at guessin'!"

"How many men have they got?"

"Bout a dozen, here."

"Who commands them?"

"The cap'n."

"What is his name?"

"Look here, mister, ef ye think I'm goin' to stan' here like a stoughton bottle an' cough every time you sneeze, your off yer kerbase, an' doncher forgit it either. What d'ye take me fur, anyhow?"

"I take you for a young man who is smart enough to know on which side his bread is buttered, and who stands ready to help me in the job I've got on hand, for which assistance you will receive enough money to keep you for years."

"Oh! ye do, eh! Well, ye never was more mistaken in yer bull life, than ye air now, 'cos I ain't goin' to do no sich thing."

Sharp frowned angrily.

"What are you going to do, then?"

"I'm going to turn you over to the boys for them ter play with. Ye've seen cats play with mice, ain't ye? Well, this 'ere's a place where ther mice play with the cat, see? Kinder odd, ain't it? It's loads o' fun, though, when it once gits goin', and the boy grinned as though delighted with the prospect.

Sharp's back had been, during the dialogue with Chipmonk, turned toward the opening by which they had entered the cavernous room and he had not seen the three forms that had filed noiselessly in and posted themselves behind him. But Chip had, and governed himself accordingly. While he was talking, the muzzles of his revolvers had been gradually lowered until they were pointing at the floor, and noticing this, and remembering that Chip had said that no noise could reach the inner cavern, with a sudden bound Sharp leaped forward, intending to seize the boy and bear him to the ground.

But he reckoned without his host, for the lad was as nimble as the creature whose name he bore, and he dodged the detective as easily as a swallow will dodge a stone in the air.

Sharp came up at the other side of the room, and turned quickly to again dart after the boy, but there, before him, stood three men, each with a revolver aimed at his head, while Chipmonk laughing with unconcealed mirth, exclaimed:

"First ye ketch yer rabbit!"

To say that the detective was dismayed when he saw the turn that affairs had taken would be to express it altogether too mildly. He had believed what Chipmonk had said: that they were safe from interference where they were, and, indeed, that had been true but for the fact that the three had been out in obedience to a command from the governing power, and were returning by the Bush, as that entrance was called, when they discovered the light in the little room.

They had stepped inside the door, after waiting long enough on the outside to catch the situation of things, and Chipmonk had discovered them just in time to snape his last few remarks accordingly.

"What does this mean? Who are you?" cried Sharp, as soon as he realized just what was barring his passage from the cavern-room."

A loud guffaw from the three men announced that they at least appreciated the humor of the situation.

"Did ye come ter call on us?" asked one, sarcastically.

"Chip," said another, with a grin, "who stuffed it fur ye, eh? Are ye sure it's dead?"

"Looks 's though 't mought be from N' York, shore 'nuff!" chimed in the third, who had himself, evidently, come from Virginia.

"What'll we do with him, lads?" was the next remark.

"Can't do much, seein' the Cap's gone away. He'd blow us all to blazes ef we didn't wait fur him to come back. Ye see, Mr. Detective, we know'd as how ye war on the mountain, and when the boss went away ter-night he told me

to leave yer 'lone ef yer left us alone, but ef ye didn't, ter save ye till he kim back."

"I'm sort o' boss here when he's gone, an' Pomp ain't around, so I'll jist make the apologies an' then we'll clap ye inter the dungeon. Sorry we can't hang ye ter-night, but it's out o' ther question. Tell ye w'ot we will do, tho', we'll put ye inty ther same dungeon whar Jim Jarman spent his last few days. Ye know he kim up here on ther same sort of a 'skursion ye have, and Chip, here, got onter him jast as he did you. We had ter hang him, ye know, 'cos ef we hadn't he'd 'a' hung us. I hope ye sees the justice in it—I do."

"Well, we'll put ye in there. The boys do say as how it's haunted by the feller w'ot starved ter death there afore Jim was done up, but you're so brave ye won't mind a little thing like that, will 'e, Chip?"

"Right ye be!" cried Chip, who was evidently greatly elated by the prospect. "D'ye think ye'll hang this feller?"

"Sure!"

"Why don't ye roast him?"

"Roastin's too good for him. The nicest way's ter hang him up by the ears. He looks good 'n' tough; I don't believe they'll pull out."

"Come, Chip!" cried another, "fetch him out!"

"Jist wait afore ye do that!" cried a voice from the doorway that made every one start with surprise and terror, for it was a voice which was unfamiliar to every one there except the boy and the captive detective.

With one cry they turned to face the new foe, but, as they did so, there was a loud report from the doorway, and, with one bound, something shot by the shadow-line and seized one of the three by the throat.

It was the dog, Pomp, and Sam Sharp knew that Green Mountain Joe was on hand to help him, and then the fight began.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was Green Mountain Joe's voice which so astonished the counterfeiters as they were about to lead Sam Sharp, a captive, into the deeper part of the cavern, and when Pomp leaped through the doorway, bearing one of the men to the floor with him, where he was held as tightly as though bound by leather thongs, Joe sprung after him, and instantly fell upon one of the remaining two with a fury almost equal to that of his dog.

Sharp was by no means slow to take the cue, for no sooner had he recognized Joe's voice than he began the battle for liberty.

The whole thing happened so quickly that the counterfeiters had no time in which to draw their weapons, but could only fight hand-to-hand, as they had been attacked, and it left Chipmonk unmolested, and still with the two revolvers ready for instant use in his hands.

Sharp thought of that as he grappled with his man, but he knew there was no help for it.

That Chip had only to shoot the dog in order to turn the tide of battle he fully realized, but no report followed, no sounds broke the stillness except the deep breathing of the four men as they struggled for the mastery, and the muttered curses of the fellow who lay upon the floor, staring up into the bloodshot eyes of the hound, fearing to move a muscle, lest the dog's savage growl should be carried into execution, and his already lacerated throat be torn to pieces by the glistening white teeth.

In a struggle where muscular power is the test, seconds seem like minutes, and minutes lengthen out into hours, and what appears to the participants like an endless period of time, is really very short, for the great exertion cannot continue indefinitely. Before the lapse of many moments, one or the other of those struggling for the mastery must give way, and then the battle is practically ended.

For Joe, who had grappled with the big Virginian, the effort was very great, for, although the Vermonter was a big, powerful man, he had found his match, and two or three times, as they swayed to and fro, he feared that the counterfeiter would prove too much for him.

They tugged, and strained, and swayed back and forth, now one of them sinking upon one knee, and then the other, so intent upon the test of strength, that neither thought of striking a blow, and, indeed, if they had, there would have been no time for it.

Where was Chipmonk all that time? What was he doing?

Sharp tried in vain to see his small figure somewhere in the room, as he struggled and fought with his opponent, but the little fellow had disappeared entirely.

Suddenly there was a heavy fall, and the Virginian lay flat upon his back, while, over him, with a knee upon the counterfeiter's breast, and a hand upon his throat, bent Joe.

"Surrender!" he cried, between his teeth, "or I will choke the life out of you!"

With his other hand, Joe quickly relieved the man of his weapons, and then looked up.

Sharp had succeeded with his man, for they, too, were down, the counterfeiter on the under side.

A moment more and both the detectives and Joe rose to their feet, having taken away the

weapons upon the two defeated counterfeiters, then, having performed the same service for the other one who was kept down by the dog, they looked from one to the other, the strain over, and the battle ended.

The three men were huddled together in one corner, scowling and looking anything but pleased, but they were disarmed, and before them were two men fully armed and determined, besides the great dog of which they were all afraid.

What to do next was a puzzle in the minds of both victors.

"Whar's Chip?" suddenly exclaimed Joe, who had not noticed before that he was not there.

"Chip is a traitor," replied Sam savagely. "But for him I would not have got in this fix at all, and it is my opinion that he has gone to bring the whole gang down on us here. What shall we do?"

"I'd precious soon answer that if I had some good rope," replied Joe, "but we can't take these pi'zin critters along with us, an' we can't leave 'em here 'thout some one to watch 'em, either."

"Why not leave Pomp?" asked Sam.

Before Joe could make any reply to that question, he felt a sudden twitch upon his coat behind, and turned instantly, but although he was standing close by the door, not a thing could he see.

"Jes' keep yer eye on them air skunks," he said to Sam, and, without a word, turned and stepped out into the dark corridor.

The suspicion which had vaguely come into his mind when he felt the sudden jerk proved to be true, for in the dim light which struggled out through the narrow doorway, he recognized the form of Chipmonk.

"Sh—sh—sh!" said the boy cautiously, "and don't let that detective feller git onto my racket, but, jes' listen an' I'll put ye up to suthin'!"

"Go ahead, Chip!" whispered Joe, who did not suspect that the boy had any connection with the counterfeiters.

"I know these fellers," said Chip.

"What fellers?"

"These 'ere queer covies."

"The skunks thet live in this hole?"

"Um," nodded the boy.

"Ye doan't mean ter tell me that you be one of 'em, Chip, do ye?" and Joe's great, powerful right hand settled like a vise upon the boy's arm, so that he knew he could not get away if he tried.

"No, no, Joe; but they think I be, don't ye see? An' I want'er keep 'em thinkin' so; see?"

"G'won," muttered Joe, laconically, still keeping a tight hold upon the boy's arm.

"I've brung ye this 'ere rope," continued the lad, at the same time extending one of his hands, which held a coil of that article, "for ye ter tie them fellers up with; see? Then, when ye git thet done, take Sharp and skip out's quick ye know how; see? When ye've had a few minutes' start, I'll go an' alarm t'others, and they'll come here on ther jump ter rescue 'em; see? But ye'll be gone, an' I'll still be solid wid 'em. Ketch on, Joe?"

"Ye-es," said Joe, slowly, "I ketch on, but I ain't'er goin' ter hang, sonny, not 'f I know it, an' I think as how I do. Oh, yes, Chip, I ketch'd on; see?"—and he gave the boy's arm a gentle squeeze, that made him wince—"and, I'll jes' use a piece of this 'ere rope fur you, fu'st. I think ye'r' all right, Chip; onderstand me thet! I think ye kin explain all this to my satisfacshun, but, somehow, this don't seem ter be ther right sort o' place fur pow-wowin', an' so, since ye brung me ther rope, I'll jist cart ther hull b'ilin' of ye into a little place I know on not fur away, and ye kin tell me all ye've got ter say when we git thar. Do you ketch on, Chip?"

Chip grinned, evidently not a particle alarmed by Joe's manner.

"Yer head's longer'n mine, Joe," he said.

"The my dukes good 'n tight, so's them covies 'll think I'm ketched wid 'em; see?"

Joe nodded, and soon had the lad's hands tightly bound together behind his back, leaving his feet free, so that he could walk, and then, without a word, but keeping tight hold of the rope which bound the youngster, he entered the room where the others were, pulling the boy behind him.

The situation inside had not changed. Pomp and Sam Sharp were still keeping close watch over the three outlaws huddled together in one corner, while Start—the bird dog—was sitting on his haunches at the other side of the room, as unconcerned as though the present scenes were an every-day occurrence with him.

"I've got ther kid," remarked Joe, as he entered; "an' w'at's more, I've got some rope. Now, jist keep them fellers covered with your pop, while I tie 'em up, one et a time."

"Here, you big feller!" he continued, addressing the one with whom he had had the struggle, "jes' step aout here an' put yer han's behind ye. Thet's it. Naow put 'em close tergether. Pomp, ef this feller so much as moves while I'm tyin' on him up, *chaw* him!"

The big fellow stood trembling before the

massive bloodhound, while Joe busied himself fastening his hands tightly together with the same rope which held Chipmonk, and about four feet from the boy.

When the job was finished, he called out the second one and served him in the same manner, and then the third, who was the one upon whom Pomp had sprung.

"Ther dorg chawed ye up a little, didn't he?" remarked Joe, as he was fastening him. "Well, we'll heal it up afore they put ther big rope around it. There!" and he stepped back and surveyed t' work.

They were tied in line, and all with the same rope, so that one could not break away and run without dragging the others with him, even if such a thing were possible upon the thickly wooded mountain in the midst of a dark night.

"Ther twigs may poke aout a few on yer eyes," said Joe, apologetically, "but I guess ye'll go all right with that exception."

He stooped and picked up one end of the rope, furthest away from Chipmonk, and about five feet from the man who had been bitten by Pomp.

"Now, Samuel," he continued, "I'm a-goin' ter put aout this light an' start along. You take the t'other end o' ther rope next ter Chip, an' bring up ther rear, an' all you fellers 's gotter do is ter foller me, by keepin' ther rope jist taut; see? as Chip says. I'll jist prophesy one thing afore we start, an' thet is, ef one of ye tries ter git away, Pomp 'll chew ye up quick-er'n a toad kin ketch er fly!"

He got them all into line, and then the light was put out, and the strange procession started through the darkness which seemed blacker than ever.

But, Joe never hesitated, and presently they emerged into the open air through the bushes where Chip had crept with Sam Sharp.

Not a word was spoken; not a sound of any kind broke the stillness of the night, more than that necessarily made by their feet as they here and there rested upon a twig which snapped with a seemingly loud report.

Joe was taking them to a place where he knew they could not be followed, even by a dog, unless the dog went with them or knew the way as well as he and Pomp did; to a cave that he had discovered long years before, and which he had gradually made habitable, and of the existence of which he was sure every one but himself was ignorant.

CHAPTER XIV.

TO JOE'S RETREAT—IN AWFUL PERIL.

It was necessarily slow work for Joe and Sam with their captives, to make their way along the steep mountain-side through the tangled undergrowth, rendered ten times more unpassable by the darkness, and none of them escaped severe scratches from the boughs, and bruises from the stones and stumps in their route.

But they were led by an indomitable spirit; by one who did not know how to construe the word falter, and so they stumbled on, Sam and Chipmonk too proud to complain, and the others in too great fear of the great dog, whose nose each would occasionally feel pressed against him.

The journey from their starting-point consumed nearly an hour, although not more than a quarter of a mile in actual distance had been covered.

Their route lay along the side of the mountain, gradually ascending until they came to a place where the ground for some distance was almost level, and where they could hear the ripple of water.

Presently they entered it, and all had to walk knee-deep in the cold brook which bubbled from a living spring a short distance back, and after filling up the little hollow of the flat already mentioned, divided itself into a hundred little streamlets and went dashing, leaping down the mountain-side to the valley below.

They continued on in the water for fully three hundred feet before they left it and began to descend a little, finally coming to a full stop.

"Come 'ere, Sam," said Joe; "never mind the prisoners, 'cos if one of 'em stirs, Pomp 'll make short work of him, you bet. This 'ere's a cliff, an' a high one too, an' down there in the darkness is a ledge, wide 'nuff so if ye should fall over now, ye'd land on it an' stay there 'thout fallin' any further."

"How far down?" asked Sam, shivering a little, for by the starlight now struggling through he could see enough to discern that there was a great gulf beneath them.

"Baout nine 'r ten feet. Now what I want ye to do's this. I've got er ladder thet I made up here once, hid away not far off, an' I'm goin' ter git thet ladder, and I want ye ter go down it fu'st, in order ter receive these fellers when they came daown. Ye jist stiddy ther ladder at ther bottom while I hold it at the top. I'll cut ther rope atween each one of 'em, an' they'll hafter go daown as best they kin. If they fall it's their own funeral, not mine. Ther ladder slants enough so's there's no danger, unless they're fools."

So saying, he disappeared in the darkness, returning presently with a long rough ladder

made of tough beech-limbs, and capable of holding a ton.

This he lowered carefully until it rested upon the ledge below, and then told Sam to start.

The detective was brave, but he could not avoid a slight shudder and a feeling of chilliness as he placed his foot upon the ladder preparatory to making the descent over the side of the high cliff in the middle of the night. The whole thing possessed a sort of terror for him which he had never before experienced, but he was full of pluck, and did not hesitate. He knew that he could place implicit confidence in Joe, and so he started down.

"Strike er match when ye git down," said Joe, "so's ter see whar ye air, an' when ye'r ready, say so, and I'll send down ther fu'st installment."

Sam disappeared over the side of the cliff.

Presently the glimmer of a faint light could be seen for a moment, quickly disappearing, however, and then Sam's voice was heard:

"All right—I am ready," he said.

In an instant Joe had cut the rope between the first and second of the counterfeiters.

"Naow, you!" he said, "git onto that ladder, face a'out, and mosey daown it's quick's ye know baow;" but the fellow hung back.

"Untie my hands," he said, "an' give a feller a chance."

"Talk ter him, Pomp," was Joe's reply, "cos I don't like argyng," and the dog placed his cold nose against the counterfeiter's fettered hands and growled ominously.

With a shiver of horror, he stepped quickly to the ladder, where Joe helped him to get a footing, and then he began to work his way slowly downward.

It was terrifying, descending into an unknown abyss face outward, and with his hands tied tightly behind him so that he could hardly clasp the rungs behind him at all; but the terror of the dog which had already bitten him was greater, and so he went.

Slowly, slowly, one step at a time, and taken with great care, until finally he felt the detective's hands seize and steady him, and he knew that he was safe.

Sam led his charge back some distance upon the ledge and told him to lie down and keep perfectly quiet if he did not wish to fall off, and then returned to the ladder.

"All right!" he called up; "send down the next," and in another moment the trembling of the beach limbs told him that the second one was descending.

He arrived safely, and received the same caution from Sam which the first had had, and then the third one came.

"Now, Chip," said Joe, "I'm goin' ter untie yer little fists an' let ye go laown yer own way," and accordingly the boy soon began scrambling nimbly down.

Having reached the bottom, Sam gave the signal, and Joe, taking Start in his arms, began his descent. Pomp, being so heavy, was obliged to remain outside, and before starting, Joe admonished the dog not to leave, but to remain on guard and warn them of the approach of any danger.

When about half-way down, there was a sudden cry of rage from below, a scuffling of feet, and then something seemed to strike the ladder, knocking it from its position as the wind hurls a dead leaf.

Joe realized that he was falling, and he knew if he went over the edge of the little table-rock whereon Sam was awaiting him, there would be no chance for his life, for the distance was very great.

With the instinct of self-preservation which is always in a man when in danger, he instantly remembered that he was fully half-way down and could therefore have but a little ways to fall, and he dropped the dog and threw his body backward and around with the same motion.

The whole thing lasted not more than a second, but his mind seemed to work with the rapidity of lightning in that brief instant.

Joe struck upon the very edge of the shelving rock and, fortunately, in such a way that it hurt him very little; but while trying to regain his feet, he lost his balance and toppled over the precipice.

As he fell he clutched the rock with both hands, and, in an instant more, was hanging suspended over hundreds of feet of space with nothing between him and a horrible death but the strength of his fingers, which were clasped over the rock above his head.

To realize the fullness of his terrible position, it must be remembered that it was night, and so dark that it was scarcely possible to discern one's hand before one's eyes.

Above him was Sam, alone with three desperate men, whose hands were bound securely, to be sure, but whose feet and legs were free, and who had but to get rid of their captors in order to very shortly set themselves free. Ay, and more; he had forgotten Chipmonk, whose hands he had loosed before the boy went down the ladder. Could it be possible that Chip had knocked the props from under him? No, no!

"Help, Sam—help!" cried Joe, desperately. "I am hanging over the edge of the rock. Catch hold of my wrists and pull me up."

No answer came, and then he listened, and thought he could hear scuffling going on overhead.

Yes, surely they were having a fight there, and a desperate one too, he thought. Oh, if he were only there, or if Pomp could get down.

There hung Joe, suspended in mid-air, straining his eyes and ears to see and hear something through the blackness of the night.

As he looked, the clouds which had been gathering for some time seemed to burst open, and through them sped a swift electric flame, lighting up the whole mountain for one brief instant.

By its light Joe saw a sight which made an impression upon him which he never forgot.

Just over his head, swaying to and fro in each other's grasp, and in momentary danger of toppling over the shelf into the abyss, were Sam and the Virginian, who had somehow got his hands free, while further up over their heads, with his huge neck and shoulders leaning far over as he seemed to watch the struggle with eager and furious interest, was the dog Pomp.

Several seconds flitted by, and then Joe heard the combatants fall together to the rock, where the fight was still kept up, each striving to force the other over the side and at the same time save himself from following, and each clinging desperately to the other, fully realizing that to slacken their hold in the slightest degree meant certain death on the rocks below.

It was a most terrifying situation.

Joe almost forgot his own peril in his interest in the fight going on over his head, and two or three times tried vainly to swing himself upon the rock above, nearly losing his hold upon it in consequence.

Suddenly there came an interruption from a most unexpected quarter.

A huge body revealed itself to Joe in one of the lightning flashes. It was shooting downward through the air, and the Vermonter recognized it instantly.

It was Pomp, whose dog nature could no longer stand the strain, for he felt that his master was in danger, and he fearlessly took the leap to his rescue.

Joe shut his eyes.

In that instant he thought that his beautiful dog, that he loved so dearly, would be killed, or would have his bones broken by the leap, for it was a sheer fall of ten feet, and the dog was very heavy.

But, Pomp was sagacious, and his eyes were made to see in the dark as well as in the light.

When he leaped from the cliff above, it was directly for the struggling men upon the ledge, and, true to his intent, he lit squarely upon one of them, knocking the breath out of the other as he rolled over upon his feet, unhurt by the plunge.

It was the Virginian who received the greatest force of Pomp's weight, and the dog, regaining his equilibrium instantaneously, sprang upon him again with all his fierceness, as the counterfeiter was trying to rise.

The onslaught of the dog was terrible. His body was big and heavy, and he flung it against the outlaw with all the fury of his nature.

For an instant the man staggered back, but he was too near the edge to regain his balance.

He tried with all his power, swinging his arms over his head in the vain effort to throw his weight forward. But it was of no avail.

With a wild cry, which went echoing from rock to rock up the gorge, he toppled over, and fell down, down, down into the darkness and terror of the yawning gulf below, nearly carrying Joe along with him as he went.

"Help! help!" cried Joe again, and that time Sam both heard and answered.

The lightning was now coming in almost constant flashes, and as Sam crept nearer to the edge, he could see Joe's upturned face looking into his.

"Courage, Joe!" he cried, "and I will find a way to save you!"

"You and Pomp can pull me up," cried Joe. "My fingers are giving out."

By that time Pomp's nose was thrust over the rock near his master's hands.

"Ketch hold of one wrist," said Joe to Sam, "an' pull me up 's fur's ye kin, an' then hang on, ef it breaks my arm. That's right," as Sam obeyed. "Here, Pomp, old boy—stick your head over a leetle further! Good dog! good dog!"

With one mighty effort Joe loosed his other hand from the rock, springing upward as much as he could as he did so.

He succeeded in catching Pomp by the huge collar which encircled his neck, and the dog, as if understanding what was expected of him, started back, pulling with all his strength.

"Pull, Pomp!" cried Joe; "pull ez ye never pulled afore! Pull, Sam, an' God bless ye!"

Up—up he came; slowly at first, then faster, both dog and man exerting themselves to their utmost, and in a moment more Joe lay panting and exhausted upon the ledge.

CHAPTER XV.

CHAINED TO THE WALL—THE ROUND MARBLE.
"Ef some of you coveys don't stick a thumb in this 'ere pie afore long, suthin' 'll bu'st, sure!"

was the first remark which broke the stillness, after Pomp and Sam had pulled Joe over the rock to safety.

For the first time since the struggle began, Sam remembered that there were two other counterfeiterers as well as young Chipmonk upon the ledge with him, and when Chip's voice spoke up with its characteristic manner, he turned instantly.

The lightning was still flashing brightly, and as it came and went, Sam could see one of the outlaws stretched flat upon his back, evidently senseless, while the other one was struggling with the boy, who had him tightly clinched around the legs, and was holding on with all the strength his young arms could muster.

Sam took in the situation at a glance, and, in that instant, forgave the lad for any inconvenience which his actions in the fore part of the night had caused him.

He saw that the boy, with more than ordinary bravery, had stepped into the breach at the right moment, and had saved them all.

The ladder in falling had struck one of the captive counterfeiterers upon the head, for the Virginian whose ferocious strength had enabled him to burst the bonds which held him, had not paused to warn his friends when he seized the ladder, intending to hurl it and Joe far out into the abyss; and the man thus felled, (for the beechwood limbs were very heavy), never knew what had struck him. He was instantly killed.

When the struggle between Sam and the Virginian took place, the third counterfeiter had started to aid his friend, hand-bound though he was, and Chipmonk had sprung forward and seized him around his legs with both arms, where he clung like a leech, and they had rolled over and over in the outlaw's mad efforts to free himself.

But the boy never once slackened his hold; he clung tighter and tighter, and when at last he spoke, it was because he realized that then somebody could and would come to his aid.

Joe saw, too, and realized what was going on.

"Let go, Chip," he said. "Pomp's 'ere naow, and ef the feller don't subside I'll set the dog on him."

The counterfeiter instantly ceased his efforts, for he knew then that the struggle was over, and that it had gone against his friends; and he knew, moreover, what it meant for Pomp to be set upon him, for he was the one whose neck the big dog had seized when Joe first interrupted their plans in the little cavern room.

"Thar, naow!" exclaimed Joe, still rather breathless, but sufficiently recovered to rise to his feet; "I guess I'm able to strike a light by this time, an' ef ye'll all keep still till I kin aout, thar won't be no danger of pitchin' over the ledge."

They heard him walk away, and the flashes of lightning told them that he had disappeared, but in a few moments they could see a glimmer of light away back among the rocks, and presently Joe came into sight with a lantern in his hand.

The light revealed the entrance to a cave, high enough for a man to walk through by stooping somewhat.

"Naow kin on, all on ye, an' I'll make ye more comfortable," exclaimed Joe, when he reappeared. "Iuster like ter set on that ledge an' onravel knots in my head, but I think I'll hate th' durn place now, since that feller went over an' gave that yell. Where's th' other crooks?"

"One on 'em's dead," said Chip.

"What! another?"

"Yeus; th' ladder ketched him on th' top-knot an' cracked it fur him."

"Whew!" whistled Joe. "Say, young feller," turning to the only remaining one of the three captives, "ye'd best be sorter keerful, fur this 'ere trip's provin' kinder fatal to your branch o' ther party. Well, kin on."

He led the way into the side of the cliff, being obliged to stoop considerably to do so. The path led downward by a sharp decline for some distance, when they suddenly came to another ladder, down which Joe led the way. It was from fifteen to twenty feet long, and had been made by Joe, as the other had, of heavy young trees or limbs of beechwood.

Once at the bottom of the ladder it was a perfectly easy matter for them to stand upright, for indeed the roof of the cavern was fully ten or twelve feet over their heads.

The corridor in which they were standing was quite wide, and from the top, as well as extending from the sides, were fragments of the harder rock which had never crumbled.

"In abaout two minutes I'll show you the curiousest thing ye ever seen," remarked Joe, when the party had reached the foot of the ladder and started onward. "Mebby you, Mr—Sam, kin explain it, but I can't. Thar! look at thet!"

They had reached a point where the cavern had broadened out considerably, and immediately in front of them, and therefore in the center, was a huge rock, nearly as round as an old-fashioned bullet, and fully ten feet in diameter.

Joe held the light near the stone, so that they could inspect it closely, and Sam saw that it

was composed of marble, and was as white and smooth as if it had been polished by a marble-worker.

"Ef thet don't look's though 'twas put thar, I'm a woodchuck," remarked Joe as he exhibited it, "an' yet, it couldn't be, 'cept by th' Almighty. It's ther only marble I ever found in this cave, an' it stan's right in the center of quite a large chamber, as ye see."

"It certainly is a strange freak of nature," replied Sam. "I can understand how some convulsion might have cast it in with the limestone which once surrounded it, but what has polished it in such shape is a mystery, unless there has once been a torrent of water rushing through here, and one would suppose we were too high up on the mountain for that."

Joe again started on, making a sharp turn to the right behind the marble, passing through a much narrower part of the corridor, and finally emerging into a large chamber which he said was the end of the cave.

"The thing goes no further," he said. "I've looked an' looked, but all the cave I could ever find, you have seen, so thet knocks yer torrent theory ter blazes, don't it? Tell me w'ot ye think of my den."

He had properly named it a den. The chamber was very irregular in shape, though nearer square than round. In one corner was a rudely constructed cot made of branches, and provided with two heavy horse-blankets, and in the center was a fireplace made of pieces of rock. On one side, every little bit of projecting rock held some sort of implements, either for cooking or for use in his taxidermist pursuits.

Several stuffed specimens were arranged in different positions about the place, and two rudely manufactured stools completed the furniture of the apartment.

Joe soon lighted a second lantern, and then proceeded to make a fire, remarking as he did so that he did not know what became of the smoke, only that it found a way out somehow, for it never bothered him.

"I've got jest the thing fur you," he said to the counterfeiter. "It's a thing wot'll keep ye from tryin' ter git away. I had a young bear here once, an' I used it fur him, but he got so blasted ugly I had ter shoot him, an' Pomp never could let the brute alone, either."

He produced a stout chain, one end of which was fastened to a large staple soldered into the rock, the other end being provided with a huge leather collar, studded with brass nails and bound with fine wire.

"Thar!" he said, "Bruin couldn't break it, nor chew the collar neither, an' I don't believe ye kin; it's long enough fur ye to stan' up in an' move around enough for exercise, so jes' kin 'ere while I lock it on ye."

But the counterfeiter held back. He evidently had a deep-rooted objection to being chained to the wall like a wild beast.

Joe saw his hesitation, and said:

"Pomp, jest help thet feller, will ye?" but the moment Pomp's name was mentioned, the man needed no further urging, but stepped quickly forward and stood quiet while Joe locked the huge collar around his neck.

He then removed everything from the outlaw's pockets, placing them carefully upon a shelving rock where he said they would remain until their owner claimed them; and then he cut the rope which bound his hands so tightly together.

"Thet's better, ain't it?" he asked; "ye'd ruther be chained then tied, wouldn't ye? I would."

"Say, Sam," he continued, "an' you, too, Chip. I'm es hungry es a bear, an' ef ye wanter ye kin take one of them lanterns an' look around the cave while I'm fryin' a piece of bacon fur us."

It was precisely what Sam most wished to do. An idea had been revolving in his head ever since he had entered the cave with Joe, and he wanted to prove it either faulty or true without delay, and therefore, as soon as Joe had mentioned it, he took up one of the lanterns, and followed by Chip, disappeared in the direction of the round marble.

"What's yer name, young feller?" Joe asked of the prisoner as soon as they were alone, and while he was busying himself with the bacon, etc.

"Barnes," laconically.

"Barnes, eh? W'ot sorter Barnes? Hay Barnes, Horse Barnes, er w'ot?"

"Charles Barnes."

"Whar d'ye live when ye're ter hum?"

"In New York. What are you asking so many questions for? What good will it do? You have got me chained here like a beast, where I suppose you will leave me to starve, when you go away."

"Starve? not a bit of it, Charlie; it ain't my natur', ter do thet! Questions? well, ye've got some sense, (though not much, 'er ye wouldn't be in the bizness ye'r in), an' ye've got grit, an' I like thet, an' I want ye ter answer my questions, an' mebbby bimeby ye'll find out thet I've gotter good reason fur axin' on 'em—an' ag'in, mebbby ye won't. It depen's on haow ye answer 'em."

"Well, go ahead," said Barnes, "and I'll answer all I can of them."

"How long hev ye follered yer biz?"
 "About a year."
 "Up here all the time?"
 "Nearly."
 "Why don't ye be honest, eh?"
 "That is a hard question to answer; it would take too long, but I never meant to be dishonest until I got into trouble through no fault of mine, and was sent to prison for it. I was as innocent of wrong as you are, and yet I spent five years in prison, and when I came out I had no friends or character left, and so went to the bad."
 "Would ye be honest naow, ef ye could?"
 "I do not know; perhaps not."
 "Well, ye're a fool, thet's all!"
 "I know it, so what is the use of arguing?"
 "How many men are there in that cave up th' mountain?"
 "I can not answer that."
 "Why not?"
 "Because, rough as they are, they still are my friends, and I will not betray them."
 "W'ot! not ter save yerself?"
 "No."
 "Thet's part grit an' part cussedness."
 The man did not answer, and presently Joe spoke again.
 "Have ye got er father 'n mother, Charlie?"
 Barnes started as if stung by a bee, but made no reply.
 "Ye're a young feller, not over twenty-five or thirty, an' meby they're livin' yet; air they?"
 "I do not know; if they are, they think me dead, so what matters it?"
 Joe was about to reply by asking another question when there came a very sudden and very unexpected interruption.
 It was Chipmonk, who sprung into the chamber crying:
 "Joe—Joe—Joe!!!"
 "What in blazes 's the matter?" exclaimed Joe.

"That detective chap an' me went ter the round marble," said Chip, breathlessly, "an' we looked all around it fur suthin' 'r ruther, an' bimeby he though the spied 'r hole 'way under one side. The hole wasn't bigger 'n a wood-chuck's when he first saw it, but he got down onter his han's an' knees, an' crawled in under th' marble 's fur 's he could an' poked the lantern down. He was tryin' ter squeeze further in under th' rock an' I was leanin' ag'in' it, when blest if the thing didn't topple over an' roll away. I fell on top o' him, and rolled off jist in time ter see both him an' the lantern go clean out o' sight through er hole 's big around 's a wash-tub, an' I yelled an' yelled, but he didn't answer, and so I crawled all the way back here in the dark."

CHAPTER XVI.

PICKING UP LOOSE ENDS.

VERA PRESTON had been in London-derry over three weeks in the guise of Miss Jenkins, when Sam Sharp first made his appearance there, but she disappeared on the same day that he arrived.

She took the morning stage to Chester, and from there departed on the train in the direction from whence she had come, and everybody would have been astonished had they known that she came back to the little mountain village in a buggy during the same night.

But she did, and in another disguise; one which concealed her perfectly from recognition. Two or three times she was looked upon rather scrutinizingly, but she bore it well, and thus warded off all suspicion from the minds of others as to her identity.

During her sojourn, she had kept Chipmonk almost constantly with her, questioning and talking to him upon many topics and seeking information about the surrounding country. Many was the long ramble she had taken with Chip for her guide, and people generally had put her down in the memoranda for gossip always religiously kept in a country village, as rather "queer like," and had congratulated Chip upon having secured an easy job, at good pay, hoping to find out something more than they already knew about Miss Jenkins.

But Chip was one of those peculiarly intelligent lads who keep things very much to themselves, seldom having a confidant in anything, and even then, the confidential communications being very limited and sparse; and he and Miss Jenkins roamed the fields and woods and mountains together, for she proved herself to be a great walker and an indefatigable climber.

Chip left 'Derry the morning before she finally went away, and was not seen again until the day after, when he was there as usual.

Two or three tried to question him about his late employer, but he gave them no more

satisfaction than he had when she had been in the village, and so they presently forgot almost that she had existed.

Vera knew nothing of Sam Sharp's real character—indeed, did not know of him at all, so her departure on the same day that he came, only has to do with the chronology of our story.

Captain Quickeye had returned to the city in quest of his friend Burke, but had found that the would-be counterfeiter had disappeared, leaving a note for his friend which said in part:

"I have decided to act upon your advice—at least to a great extent. I can never tell you the true effect your earnest words in the boat had upon me, and I have sought with all my power to decide upon the proper and manly course for me to pursue, and I have finally come to a conclusion. Whether it is right or not, I cannot determine. I think you could tell me best about that, but I shall not see you again—at least not now. When I do—when we meet again, if ever (and I almost hope we never will) you will tell me what you think. I have certainly flown from one temptation which would have led me into the commission of an act, the remembrance of which would have followed me to the grave. Good-by, captain. My best wish for you is, that you would take the advice you gave me and follow it. Seek some other country and begin life over again, striving to atone for that one crime which was the first in your history, and which you so vaguely hinted at when talking with me in the boat. Do not think me presumptuous, and bear in mind the fact that should we ever meet again in this world, many things now dark to us both will become clearer, and rest assured that whatever happens, I am at heart your friend—aye, your sincere friend, though we are almost strangers."

BURKE."

Quickeye had read and reread the letter from Burke until he knew it almost by heart.

There were ambiguities in it which he could not explain, and about it all hung a sense of latent prophecy which seemed to foretell the happening of an unpleasant event.

"Burke is a queer fellow," he muttered, over and over again. "I never saw a man who inspired me with such a peculiarly mingled feeling of confidence and fear. I should, without hesitation have taken him to Glebe Cavern. That he is every inch a man of his word, I have not the slightest doubt, and somehow I feel that we will some day meet again."

Little did Captain Quickeye realize how and when that meeting would take place; little did he foresee the real prophecy of the letter; little was he able to read "between the lines," the words which Burke's loyalty to others would not permit him to write, and yet which he longed to inscribe.

The captain was always busy, and in his character of Daniel Bertrand, in search of himself, he was obliged to report occasionally to the inspector for policy's sake.

He went to and fro from the city to his cavern retreat on The Glebe, as frequently as the demands upon him would permit, preferring to pass the greater part of his time in the guise of Arnold Holt, who lived in a house which he had fitted up near London-derry, because he liked the country.

As Arnold Holt, he was thought "stuck-up" and proud by his neighbors, who looked upon him as a sort of crank who had lots of money, and spent most of it in fancy horses and cattle.

Indeed, that was the one real enjoyment in the man's life. His ill-gotten gains were not thrown away upon the gaming-table, nor spent in riotous living, but in embellishing and beautifying the little farm he owned, where he spent many hours among his animals.

His nature was a strange combination of cruelty and kindness. Most men who tread the path of wrong-doing, do so from lack of conscience, from very choice; but he did it because he had been too careless to avoid it after the one mad act which had wrecked his life, and he had drifted from bad to worse, always, however, carrying about with him a keen perception of his sins, and ever pursued by the bitter sting of conscience.

A word here as to his relations with the boy Chipmonk.

While awaiting the departure of the train at the Grand Central Depot one day, a gamin had requested permission to shine his boots, and while doing it, Quickeye had regarded him closely.

The boy's bright black eyes and clear-cut olive features had impressed him peculiarly, and while speeding away in the train a few

moments afterward, he could not get them out of his mind.

When next he passed that way, he had again engaged the boy to shine his boots, and had talked with him.

And so their acquaintance went on, until the man had taken the boy with him to his Vermont farm, where he had worked for a long time for the counterfeiter chief, finally becoming possessed of all his secrets by means of his natural shrewdness and watchfulness.

One day he had refused to work any longer at the farm, and Quickeye had sent him to the cavern on the mountain where he would stay days at a time, or roam about the woods; and finally he took to staying more in the village, disappearing, as Joe had told Sam, for days at a time. He was a strange boy, preferring his rags to better clothes, and paying very little or no heed to remarks, criticisms or advice, always ready with an answer, no matter how sharp, until people finally began to let him alone, looking upon him as a sort of unnatural growth which had sprung up spontaneously among them.

When he met Joe the morning he and Sam started for the Glebe, it was but three days after the last of the long interviews between him and Miss Jenkins, and his little head had, as soon as he spied the stranger with Joe, grasped the real situation of affairs, and he resolved to accompany them at all hazards.

How he managed it, we have already seen, and what happened on the mountain we already know up to a certain point.

Just why he had taken Sharp's pistols from him and made him prisoner, and afterward, when Joe had appeared upon the scene, changed about like a weather-cock, fighting upon the other side, does not yet appear.

But his head was clear, and his power of reasoning deep, and for so young a person, profound.

Chipmonk was the means whereby great things were to be accomplished, though as yet, nobody suspected it—except himself. He knew, however, just what he could do, and he was firmly resolved that Sam Sharp should not balk him in his endeavor, come what might. His personal ends were greater than any others, and he would attend to them first.

CHAPTER XVII.

A TREACHEROUS ROCK.

FOR a moment after Chipmonk appeared in the cavern chamber and made his startling announcement, Joe stood with uplifted fork, upon the prongs of which hung a large piece of bacon which he was about turning as the boy entered.

"Chip," he said, finally and deliberately, "ef it warn't fur yer big black eyes, an' the way ye'r breathin' I'd believe ye war lyin'; as 'tis, I think ye'r thunderin' mistook. That air marble couldn't roll over, boy! But we'll go an' hev a look, anyhow, fur I kin see thet ye'r scart, an' it's the fu'st time I ever know'd ye ter be, too."

So saying he took up the remaining lantern and started to leave, closely followed by the lad, but the voice of their prisoner arrested them.

"Are you going to leave me here to starve?" asked Barnes.

"No—I'm comin' back," said Joe, pausing. "I'm sorry ter leave ye here in the dark, but nothin' 'll hurt ye. Kim along, Chip."

A moment or two brought them to the Round Marble, and there, sure enough, Joe quickly discovered that it was out of place, and that there was a hole through the floor where it formerly stood, fully as large as a bushel basket.

Without a word, and motioning Chipmonk to keep back, Joe fell flat upon his body, face downward, and began edging cautiously toward the hole, feeling all around its edges with his hand in order to discover if there was any chance of the sides caving in, but it seemed perfectly strong, and so he ventured further and further, until his face was over the opening, and his hand holding the lantern, was stretched as far downward as his arm would allow it to go.

"Sam—Sam Sharp!" he called loudly in the place, but nothing but the reverberation of his own voice broke the answering silence.

"Chip," he said next, "have ye got er string about ye, eh?"

The boy fumbled in his pockets for a moment.

"No," he said.

"Run back to the den and fetch some. Here, take the light; ye'll find a hull ball of it on one of the shelves."

Chip took the lantern and went off like a shot, presently returning with a ball of stout cord, which he gave to Joe.

Quickly tying the cord to the handle, Joe lowered the light through the opening, allowing it to slip slowly down, and swinging it a little from side to side as he did so.

Lower and lower, until finally the bottom was reached.

"Twenty feet, if it's an inch," muttered Joe. "I shouldn't a bit wonder if Sharp has got his neck broke. Naow, haow am I ter git daown thar, that's w'ot I want'er know."

"Kin ye see the detective chap?" asked Chipmonk.

"Nary a chap," replied Joe, hauling the lantern up; "but I am a-goin' down in that air-hole, an' ef he's thar, I'll find him."

"Don't go down, Joe," said Chip, softly, and in a pleading tone, and instantly Joe turned, and said sharply:

"What's got inty ye, boy? I never knew ye so squeamish. Of course I'll go daown, and ye kin stay on top ef ye like, an' wait fur me."

"I ain't squeamish," said Chip indignantly, "but I think that feller's broke his neck, an' I'm afeard ye'll break yours, that's all."

"Well, jist wait till I do. I ain't a-goin' down ther same way's Sam did; I'm a goin' ter fetch that ladder back here a piece. I don't b'lieve 't'll reach, but by thunder! ef it don't, I'll piece it out. Kim along an' carry the light, lad."

He led the way with long strides to the point where they had made the descent on the ladder, and flinging it over his shoulder with difficulty, he returned to the hole through which Sharp had so mysteriously disappeared.

As he had feared, it was considerably too short, and bidding the boy follow him, he went once more to the chamber where the counterfeiter was chained, and seizing a hatchet, began demolishing the rude cot bed.

In much less time than it takes to tell it, the little piece of furniture was knocked apart; and taking such portions as he wanted, he once more went toward the Round Marble, Chip following with the light.

With the hatchet and nails taken from the demolished cot, he began carefully to splice the ladder, lengthening it fully six feet.

The work consumed more than an hour, but at last it was ready to lower through the hole.

"Naow, Chip, ye kin go 'r stay behind, as ye've a mind to, but make up yer mind quick."

"I'm wid ye," said the boy simply.

"Good! down we go; I fu'st and you follow. Jest fetch that cord along, 'cos we'll want it," and Joe disappeared through the hole.

When they were both at the bottom, the Vermonter tied the end of the cord to the ladder, remarking as he did so:

"Thet's a good big ball o' cord, and ef we unwind it as we go, we won't git lost, thet's sart'in, onless we go further than the cord is long. I allers thought thar oughter be more cave than I found overhead, and naow I'm agoin' ter see the thing aout ef it takes me a week. Kim on, lad."

Holding the lantern over his head, in order to see the better, Joe led the way slowly along a broad, high corridor, which seemed to incline a little downward.

They had gone about a hundred feet when they met with a dilemma, in the shape of a fork in the passageway, one part, somewhat narrower than the other, leading off to the right, and the other going straight ahead, forming an angle like the upper part of the letter K.

The one leading straight onward was the broader of the two, and after hesitating for a moment, Joe said:

"We'll try this one fu'st, anyhow, an' ef we don't find nothin', we'll kim back an' try t'other. Sam Sharp's gone one way 'r t'other, 'cos the thing ends where we started. He's prob'ly struck 'bout bein' much hurt, an' as his light war aout, he's gone ter

feelin' araound, and when he found th' wall, he's started away. Thet's about the size of it, eh, Chip?"

"Right ye be," said Chip, "an' ef he touched th' right hand wall, he's took th' other passage, an' ef he struck th' left hand one, he's in front of us somewhere."

"Sure's ye live!" exclaimed Joe, admiringly. "Thet's a smart little noddle o' yourn, lad."

They kept on for a considerable distance, noting no change in the appearance of the cavern, when suddenly the ball of cord was consumed, and the end slipped from Joe's hand.

"Letter go, Gallagher," he muttered; "es long es this 'ere hallway keeps straight, thar's no danger o' gittin' lost, an' we'll pick up the twine when we kim back. Hello, w'ot's this?"

The last exclamation and question was caused by a sudden termination of the bottom or flooring of the cavern, and before them yawned a deep and apparently bottomless hole.

"Thunder an' lightnin'!" cried Joe, as he gazed, awe-struck into the abyss before them. "S'posen Sam's walked off inter that hole, Chip; I don't b'lieve he's struck bottom yet, ef he did, do you?"

"Don't know," replied Chip, breathlessly. "Mebbe he took t'other passage."

He walked to one side of the place, and pointed to a narrow shelf of rock extending onward over the hole.

It was narrow, but yet wide enough for a man to walk upon by keeping close to the rocky side of the cavern, and without an instant's hesitation Joe stepped upon it, and began working cautiously forward, Chip, perforce, following.

Ten, twenty, ay, thirty feet they edged along, exercising extreme care, and could Joe have looked into the boy's face he would have seen that he was intensely frightened, and yet his compressed lips told plainly that he had the nerve to follow his leader to the end.

Suddenly there was a loud crash, and the lad grasped Joe's arm in a convulsion of fear, while the latter leaned against the rocky side, thoroughly startled.

Well might he be, for the ledge over which they had just passed had fallen in behind them, leaving them no means of retreat, and they both felt that the spot upon which their feet were resting might follow in a moment more.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LOST IN A CAVE.

WHEN Joe told Sharp to take the lantern and examine the cave they had entered, he voiced the desire that was at the moment uppermost in the latter's mind. It was precisely what the detective most wished to do.

Followed by Chipmonk, he quickly repaired to the Round Marble, because that had struck him as being a very curious thing, and he desired to examine it more minutely than they had done when they passed it on their way in.

Having reached it, he held the light over his head and walked around the stone several times, rubbing its smooth surface with his hand.

Presently he stooped, and began peering under it, for it rested upon the floor of the cavern precisely as any hard round substance will rest upon an equally hard, though flat surface; that is to say, the point touching the rocky floor was very small when compared to the bulk of the stone.

The very first thing he discovered under the stone was the thing he had felt sure he would sooner or later discover in the cavern, *i. e.*, an aperture leading to some as yet unexplored part of the cave.

Falling flat upon his stomach, he crowded the lantern in under the rock as far as he could, hoping that he would be enabled to see through the opening, but that proved to be impossible on account of the rock's peculiar shape.

With his hand he could feel that the hole was quite large, although he could see but little of it.

Suddenly it occurred to him that as the rock was so round, it might be possible to dislodge it from its position; to roll it over away from the hole; so, calling to Chip

monk to push against it as hard as he could, Sharp pressed upward with all his strength.

His conjecture proved to be correct, for the rock, nicely balanced as it was, moved easily and quickly; so easily and quickly in fact, that both he and Chipmonk lost their balance.

Sharp fell upon his face, his head and shoulders going through the opening in the floor, but he might even then have saved himself from being precipitated bodily through the hole had not Chipmonk pitched forward upon him, his slight weight being just sufficient to add "the last straw" which toppled Sharp over completely, as he was struggling to save himself from falling.

The lantern did not once leave his hand, and that instant when he felt that he was being hurled to certain death he clutched it more tightly than ever.

Down he went like a shot, striking the floor below with a sudden jar which, although it rendered him insensible, did not break any bones.

The light which he carried was extinguished by the jar, and for several minutes Sam remained there senseless.

Presently, however, he opened his eyes, although he might just as well have kept them closed for all that he could see. Then he rose, staggering to his feet, and began groping around him.

Presently he felt a wall, and having a dazed idea that by following it, he would be conducted back to the lighted chamber where he had left Joe, he continued on, still clutching the extinguished lantern tightly in his hand.

Like any one who has received a sharp blow upon the head, sufficient to render him unconscious, his senses regained their reasoning faculties slowly, and it was not until he had walked quite a distance that the incident of his fall fully returned to him. Then he instantly turned around to retrace his steps, knowing that Chipmonk would go for Joe, and that the brave Green Mountain boy would return to his rescue.

But circumstance sometimes plays strange freaks with men, and so it was in Sam Sharp's case just then, for it both saved his life, and did him a measurably ill turn at the same time.

When he turned around, he was not more than ten feet from the hole already described, which was to bar the onward progress of Joe and Chip in their search for him, and had he gone onward, he would have unquestionably found a watery grave there, for future searchers proved it to be very deep, and nearly half filled with water.

In going toward it, Sam had, of course, taken the left-hand wall, but in turning to retrace his steps, he lost it in the dark, and presently coming in contact with the wall on the other side, proceeded along that.

It may seem strange that he did not light the lantern still clutched in his hand, but the fact is, he never once thought of it; his mind was still rather dazed from the effects of his fall.

Suddenly he paused.

"Strange," he mused, "I did not notice any turn in this thing before, but there must have been one."

He had reached the point where the fork occurred, and in returning with his hand upon the wall, had of course swung around the sharp angle forming the division between the two corridors.

He had traveled along it rather more than a hundred yards, when he suddenly exclaimed:

"What an idiot! Here I have had a lantern in my hand the whole time, and never once thought of lighting it."

He searched in his pocket for matches, and soon had what then seemed a very bright light, by which he could see wonderfully well, having been so long in the dark.

With this welcome accessory he went onward much more rapidly, until at last, quite tired out, he paused.

"I have either passed the point where I fell into this place, or have wandered off into some other part of the cavern," he mused. "What is best for me to do? Shall I turn back, or go on, trusting to luck to find some way out of here?"

"One thing is certain, there seems to be very good air here, and what little draught there is, comes from the direction in which

I have been traveling, which leads me to conclude that there is an opening into the outer world somewhere ahead of me. If I turn back it is altogether likely that I will be entirely unable to find the place where I fell, and even if I succeed in doing so, it will be impossible for me to climb up into the other cavern without aid. Again, the rock may have rolled back upon Chipmonk, killing him, and thus preventing him from giving Joe the alarm.

"On the whole I think it is best for me to keep on for a while, anyway. It will be time enough for me to turn back when I am satisfied that I cannot get out this way."

Having decided the point he again started on, walking even more rapidly than before.

"Hello! What's that?" he exclaimed, suddenly, gazing ahead of him in open-eyed wonder. "It must be Joe, looking for me; and yet he could not possibly be in that direction either."

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, a moment later, "there are three of them!"

Then suddenly a flood of light burst upon him. The thing which had at first arrested his attention was a light, evidently fastened to the wall, but when he had walked a few steps further he saw another one further on, and then another: and the conviction rushed upon him like a revelation that he had wandered into a passage which had taken him back under the very footsteps he had made but a short time before with Joe; in other words that he was in the Counterfeiters' Cave, and that the lights ahead of him were the lights the counterfeiters used in passing from one portion of their stronghold to another.

"It's an ill wind that blows luck to nobody," he muttered, instantly putting out his lantern, lest he should be discovered. "I am in a bad fix, though, the best way I can manage. It is next to impossible for me to find the place where I got into this thing, and I can't go out in the way I have started without walking right through those fellow's clutches, and if they once get a good fast hold of me, I'm a goner, sure! Anyway, I am going to see more than I can from here. In this dark place I ought to get along without being noticed much, if I keep in the shadow. I'll just leave this lantern here where I can find it if I come back this way. How I wish Joe was with me."

Putting the lantern on the floor near one of the side walls, he went forward cautiously, yet eagerly, flushed with the excitement of the moment.

"There is one of the gang that I know by sight, anyhow," he muttered, "but I don't want to meet him yet, for his sharp eyes would see through me in an instant. With the others, if any of them should accost me, I think I can give a password which will throw them off their guard."

CHAPTER XIX.

CHIP HAS A PLAN.

We left Joe and Chipmonk in a bad predicament, standing as they were, upon the narrow ledge over an apparently bottomless abyss, with all means of retreat gone, and with the constant expectation that the very next moment their foothold might fall from beneath them, and send them headlong into the mysterious black hole.

"Air ye scar't, Chip?" asked Joe, as soon as he had recovered his breath; "'cos I am, an' ye'd be more'n mortal ef ye warn't, too. One thing's sart'in, we've got ter go on, 'cos we can't go back if we want'er."

"Right ye be!" replied Chip, quiveringly, and in a voice which made Joe hold the lantern up and look at him curiously.

"Darn'd ef it hain't a'most changed yer voice, Chip," he said, lowering the light again. "Don't lose yer backbone, lad, ef ye air scar't, 'cos backbone allers counts big, even when ther odds air ag'inst ye. Kim on, an' we'll try an' git across this blasted place. 'Thar's some folk in Derry who don't b'lieve in a hell, but I think if I could fetch 'em here I'd convert 'em; eh, Chip?"

He started on over the narrow ledge, which kept growing narrower and narrower as they progressed, until it was all they could do to retain their foothold, and once or twice Chip's feet slipped nearly off the rock.

They were fully fifty feet from the point where the rock had fallen in behind them, and as yet no signs of the other side of the

black hole could be discovered, and Joe began to think there was none.

Suddenly, however, Chip grasped Joe by the arm, pointing on ahead of them to where a light could be seen rapidly crossing the corridor they were in, disappearing almost as quickly as it appeared.

"There's Sharp!" exclaimed Joe, excitedly; *Sa—!*

He had begun to shout, but before the entire syllable had escaped him, Chipmonk had sprung forward at the risk of falling and placed his hand over Joe's mouth, stopping the word ere it was uttered.

"What did ye do thet fur?" asked Joe angrily. "Sam had a lantern with him, an' he's just gone out o' sight, an' mebbe we won't see him again."

"That wasn't Sam Sharp," said Chip, breathlessly.

"It wasn't?"

"No."

"Then who was it?"

"Can't ye see?" exclaimed the boy with no little disgust.

"See? No! I—eh? What? Chip, by thunder, you're smart! I never would have thought of it, but jest es true's ye live, this here thing has led us right back to ther cave where them counterfeiters be. Holy smoke! say, we must find Sam naow, anyway!"

"Wait, Joe," said Chipmonk; "I've gotter plan, I hev, see? Jest ye listen while I give it to ye."

"Spit it aout, youngster."

"Ye see, Joe," said Chip apologetically,

"I know these 'ere fellers—"

"What—them counterfeiters?"

Chip nodded.

"Yes, I know 'em, an' wot's more, they know me, fur I been in the habit o' comin' an' goin' in an' out o' their cave fur ever so long."

"Ye ain't one of them, be ye, Chip?"

"Mebby I am, an' ag'in, mebbly I ain't, Joe, but whether I am 'r not, I am one o' you fellers, an' I'm agoin' ter stick to ye right through, ag'inst all comers, you hear me."

"Right, Chip—now wot's yer plan?"

"This, Joe. I'll go in ahead an' look around me an' see ef thar's a chance fur us ter git through this way an' go back to where we left the feller chained up, 'cos, you know we can't never git back the way we came. At ther same time I'll find out if they've got their dukes onter thet detective chap, an' ef they hev, we'll find some way ter git him out, see? You wait here till I kim back, see? I don't know jist wot I will do till I look around, but I'll do suthin' an' don't ye forgit it, either."

"Right, Chip! Thar's only one part of yer plan thet I don't like."

"Wot's thet?"

"Stayin' here. This rock we're a stan'in' on may be wide enough fur a little Chipmonk like you, but fur a great hulk of a feller like me, its sort o' narrer like. We'll jist drive on fur enough so's I kin stan' on bed-rock an' then ye kin go on and see wot's wot, eh?"

"Right ye be, Joe—right ye be!"

Again they started forward cautiously, and presently the ledge began to widen until before long they stepped off of it onto the solid flooring of the cavern beyond the black hole.

Then Chip, after advising Joe to put out the light and wait, started away through the darkness, leaving his friend in order to save him if possible.

"Surely I should have nerve enough for anything after what I have already passed through," he whispered to himself as he hurried forward. "This part of the cavern is entirely unknown to me, though I suppose it should be as familiar as any, but the light satisfied me that we were in the counterfeiters' cave, beyond doubt."

He made his way onward as rapidly as possible, occasionally stumbling over a loose rock which had fallen from the roof, or coming roughly into contact with some projection from the side, until at length his hand ran off from the wall by which he had been tracing his way, and he discovered that he had reached the point where they had seen the light cross and disappear.

As he paused and looked, he could see numerous stationary lights fixed along the walls in the new corridor which he had

found, and he thought he knew where he was at once.

Turning without hesitation, he walked boldly toward the lights, soon reaching a point where he could see plainly, and discovering that he was in the main corridor of the cave, only at that part of it furthest in the mountain.

"I must be near the headquarters," he thought. "I'll just look about me and see if the men we captured have been missed."

Advancing still further, he presently turned sharply to the right, emerging into a large chamber which looked very grotesque in the light of many lights swung from the ceilings.

Several large hand-presses were arranged about the room, while in the center was a table upon which the paraphernalia for eating were scattered profusely. Sitting around the table, and helping themselves bountifully, were a half-dozen rough-looking men engaged in eating their breakfast.

"Hello, Chip!" shouted one of the men, as the boy entered; "what brought you here at this hour? You must have started in the middle of the night."

"I didn't!" replied Chip. "I started yesterday, an' hev been in the cave all night. You fellers don't keep no watch, anyhow! a hull pack o' ceps could drop onto ye 'thout yer ever fin'in' it out. I kim in at ther bush entrance an' stopped at ther little room thar till now, see? Guv a feller suthin' t' eat, won'tcher?"

"I rec'on we will, Chip," said another. "Mosey up an' use yer dukes, 'r ye'll git left, sure 'nuff."

"Where's Barnes?" asked the boy, looking around, as he helped himself to a slice of bacon and some bread.

"Give it up!" said a third. "He 'n Tim Copper 'n Cæsar went aout on duty o' some kind 'bout dusk, an' none of 'em ain't show'd up since; seen 'em?"

"Naw; been snoozin'. It 'u'd suit me jes' 's well ef they didn't kim back at all. Cæsar's a brute; Tim Coppe's no good, an' Barnes's too stuck up fur me."

"Right ye be, Chip!" chuckled another. "Them's my sentiments ter a Tee-e."

"Anything new, lately?" asked Chip, after a moment's pause.

"Nothin'," somebody replied, and the boy went on munching his breakfast in silence.

When the meal was finished, Chipmonk arose, and passing through several of the lantern-lighted corridors, presently found himself before the wicket door, where the captain's negro attendant kept guard, and in a moment more that ebony-colored individual showed his somber face through the opening.

"Is ther captin' up?" asked Chip.

"He am," replied the negro.

"Busy?"

"Berry busy, Mas'r Chip."

"Ask him ef he wants ter see me."

"He don'."

"How d'ye know that?"

"He sed he didn't want'er see nobody, no-how," grinned the black.

"Well," said Chip, "tell him I'm here, anyhow, an' thet I'm goin' back ter the village, an' mebbly ye'll find he does want'er see me."

The negro departed, but in a moment he returned hastily, saying:

"I guess, Mas'r Chip, he reckons you is nobody, fo' he wants ter talk to you," and without further parley the boy was allowed to enter the presence of the counterfeiter chief.

Quickeye was busy writing when the lad entered, and did not look up for several moments, during which the boy flung himself familiarly upon one of the upholstered chairs which stood rather in the shadow, and waited.

Finally the note was ended, folded, sealed and directed, and then the counterfeiter chieftain raised his head.

"I was expecting you, Chip," he said. "You were seen on the mountain yesterday with Joe Alden and a stranger, and I rather looked for your report before this time."

"Couldn't git here no quicker," replied Chip, huskily, and coughing a little.

"Your cold is no better, I see," went on the captain. "Who was the stranger, Chip?"

"His name's Sharp."

"What is he?"

"Don' know; says hes a feller out huntin' with Joe, an' I guess he is."

Quickeye smiled a little at the boy's humor.

"What is he hunting, Chip," he asked, "game, or men?"

"Men, I guess."

"Then he is a detective?"

"Right ye be, Cap; he is."

CHAPTER XX.

QUICKEYE AND CHIP PLOT TOGETHER.

"WHERE did you leave them?" continued the captain, after a short pause.

"On the mountain, not fur away."

"Do you think they can find this place?"

"Can't tell; mebbly so an' mebbly not."

"What is his game?"

"Don' know."

"Does he think there are but two or three of us, that he comes almost single-handed to make the capture?"

"Don' know."

"Did he tell Joe what he was up to?"

"Don' know."

"What do you know?"

"I know he's sharper'n lightnin', an' don't fear nothin', an' I b'lieve ef there is anybody es kin find this 'ere cave 'thout knowin' whar to look, it's them two fellers, Joe an' Sam Sharp."

"I am sorry Joe is with him," murmured the captain.

"Why?"

"Because I have no wish to injure him, but I am afraid I shall be obliged to, for this man Sharp evidently knows too much, and must be effectually gotten rid of."

"Ketch him fu'st," advised Chip, laconically.

"That is easy enough; you say he is still on the mountain. I will get the men together, and you can conduct them to the place where you left this Sharp. Who is he, Chip? I am not familiar with the name."

"Tain't bizzin'."

"Oh! Do you know his right name?"

"Naw."

"Well—you will take the men to the spot where you left him, at once."

"Yas—but they won't find Joe an' the detective chap there."

"Why not?"

"'Cos they said they was agoin' ter move on, an' I said I was goin' home."

"Then you don't know where they are now?"

"No more'n you do."

Quickeye bit his lip, and stroked his mustache angrily.

"Chip," he said, sternly. "I have noticed that for some time past you have not been as smart as usual, and that you get a little more disrespectful every day. Now, understand me! you will take the men and go out on the mountain and find Joe and this Sam Sharp; do you hear?"

Chip nodded without replying.

"You can go to the spot where you left them, and from there, track them to the spot where they are now. Then you must manage in some way to get them separated, and the men will do the rest. Those are my orders, and you are expected to carry them out to the letter."

Chip was in a dilemma. He knew what it meant to defy Captain Quickeye, for the roughest men in all that rough crew which he commanded, feared him as the slave fears his hard master.

Suddenly, however, just as he had about given up seeing a way out of it, a bright idea occurred to him, and he started to his feet quickly, for he saw a chance of carrying out the one scheme of his life.

"Cap," he said, coughing a little as he spoke, "I'm sorry ye'r gittin' tired o' me ag'in, an' ef ye be, I kin jes' light out, an' not bother ye any more. I hain't meant ter be dis'pectful nor nothin' of the kind, an' ye know me well enough ter know that I'll do my level best allers."

"Yes, Chip, I have always thought so."

"Right ye be, Cap! Now I've gotter better plan nor yourn."

"What is it?"

"Why, this! I'll go out alone an' find out whar Joe an' his friend be, an' then I'll make an appointment ter meet 'em somewhere about dusk, see? That'll tell me whar they're goin' ter camp ter-night. Then I kin kim

back here an' git ther men an' take 'em there an' the rest 'll be easy, see?"

"Capital, Chip!"

"There's only one thing in the way."

"What is that?"

"The dorg—Pomp. He's a devil when he gits started, an' ye kin jest betcher life he'll git started when he smells the men moseyin' around. He's better'n a cannon for defense, he is."

"The men can shoot him before he does much harm. How many will you want, Chip? Four or five?"

"More'n that; Joe counts fur three 'r four, and from w'ot I've seen of th' other feller I guess he'll count fur about two."

"There are only a dozen here now, all told," returned Quickeye. "Go ahead, Chip, and find out where your friends are, and where they are going to camp to-night, and then return and we will make the other arrangements."

"There's jest one condition 'bout this thing that I want'er make," said Chip, as he arose to leave.

"What is that?"

"Joe's been good ter me, an' 'less ye promise me that ye'll give strict orders thet he sha'n't be hurt, I won't stir a peg."

"You won't?"

"No; not ef ye gouge out my eyes."

"Well, well, Chip, I will promise you that he shall not be hurt after you get him here, nor at all, unless it occurs in the fight when they are captured. Is that sufficient?"

"Right ye be, Cap! Now I'll skip, 'cos I know ye keep yer word allers."

In a moment more the bright, far-seeing lad was again in the main corridor, where he paused and scratched his head dubiously.

"What am I to do?" he asked himself; "Sharp, th' feller most wanted is—by hookey, he's somewhere in this very cave, as sure's my name is—Chipmonk. I begin to think I've got myself into a worse muddle than I was in before."

He was standing near what was called the end of the main corridor, although in reality it ran much further back into the mountain. But when Quickeye had selected the place for his headquarters he had found nothing beyond a certain point which offered any facilities for his business, and so he had simply not used it. The various passageways, or corridors, which were used were supplied with bracket-lamps, and Chip was near the point where they ceased.

"I wonder where that goes to," mused the lad. "Perhaps it connects with the place where Joe and I came out, somewhere back in the dark; but I hardly think that I care to explore it alone and without a light."

"What's that?" he continued, almost aloud, for he had plainly seen a little spark of light away down the unused gallery. It danced along toward him for a moment, and was then raised and extinguished, precisely as if it were a lantern, and somebody had held it up to blow out the light.

"I never knew any of the men to go down that gallery," he continued. "I'll just edge along a little ways further and see who it is, coming this way."

Accordingly, keeping his little body close to the wall, he began to work slowly toward the last lamp, watching keenly for a sign of the person who had blown out the light.

When he had reached a spot about midway between the last two he found a little crevice in the side wall into which he could squeeze himself far enough so that he was entirely concealed from view, except by a person looking straight toward him; in other words, people might have passed and repassed without noticing him—and there he waited.

Fully fifteen minutes elapsed while he was waiting thus, and he had begun to think that he had been mistaken, when suddenly he thought a light footfall had broken the dead silence around him.

Bending his head he listened acutely for a moment, and then felt satisfied that some one was approaching from the unused part of the cave.

A few moments more passed, and then, from his little niche, he could plainly see a shadow creeping slowly along the opposite side of the gallery.

The light was so dim that even tho' he was accustomed to it, it was still impossible for him to recognize the person opposite.

"I'll follow him to the next lamp," muttered the boy. "It may be one of those fellows we carried off last night, and in that case I'll have to leave."

Then he began creeping along after the figure, moving without making the slightest sound, and gradually working closer and closer.

Presently the figure neared the lamp, and then Chipmonk could see it drop flat upon its face and creep onward like a snake.

In another moment a point was reached where the light fell upon the person's back, and in that instant the boy knew who it was, for he recognized the gaudily trimmed hunting suit worn by the detective.

"Sharp! Sam Sharp!" he exclaimed in a loud whisper, springing forward at the same moment.

But he was wholly unprepared for what came next, for Sharp, hearing his name called, sprung instantly to his feet, and seeing a figure rushing toward him, turned and leaped fiercely upon the boy, bearing him to the floor beneath his weight.

CHAPTER XXI.

JOE IS CAUGHT NAPPING.

"CURSE your little hidel you would trap me again, would you?" exclaimed Sharp in a hoarse whisper as he fell upon the boy Chipmonk, crushing him roughly to the earth, but he was surprised to find that the lad did not struggle at all, but only gasped out:

"Let me speak, Mister Sharp, an' I'll 'splain."

"Well, speak then!" answered Sharp, loosing his hold so that the boy could get his breath; "but mind you, if you make a noise above a whisper, I'll choke the life out of you before you can do it a second time. Now speak; what are you doing here, when I left you in the cave with Joe?"

"I kim here wid Joe a-lookin' fur you."

"Oh, you did, eh? Well, I don't believe it. Where is Joe, then?"

"In another part of the cave."

"Bah! How is it that you didn't overtake me before I reached here?"

"Don' know, Sharpey"—the boy was getting back some of his impudence—"but I s'pect we took one gallery an' you took t'other. Joe's around t'other side now, waitin' fur me ter kim back, but I see'd yer light an' thought mebbly it might be one o' them coveys as we gobbled last night, an' so I watched, 'cos if it was, I was again' ter light out."

"Is this the counterfeiter's cave?" asked Sharp.

"Right ye be, Sharpey!"

"Then what are you roaming around here for?"

"'Cos they knows me, and ain't afraid of me, like you be."

Sharp smiled grimly.

"I think I have good reason to be," he replied, "after the trick you played on me last night."

"I only done thet fur fun," said Chip; "I was jest a-goin' ter hand back yer pops when them coveys kim in, an' then I dassent. Don't ye see? I'd ruther let 'em make mince-meat o' you than o' me, wouldn't you?"

Sam did not exactly see the force of the question when applied to his side of the case, but from the boy's point of view he appreciated the fact that it was the purest kind of logical reasoning.

"When Joe an' Pomp sprung in onter the game, I know'd it war U. P. wid the other fellers, so I jest moseyed out and fetched th' rope an' axed Joe ter tie me up too, so's 'f any of 'em got away, they wouldn't know that I worked ag'in 'em—see?"

Sam saw, and marveled at the wisdom of the little fellow.

"Do you know the cave thoroughly?" he asked.

"Like a book."

"And all of the men?"

"Better 'n I do you."

"How many are there here?"

"'Bout a dozen, countin' the three w'ot's gone."

"About nine, then?"

"Um! nine 'r ten."

"Do you know where they stay, mostly?"

"You bet!"

"Can we get past them and so out of this place?"

"I guess so; we kin try."

"Are we likely to be discovered?"

"Naw. Ef ye'll do's I want ye to, I'll git ye back ter Joe's cave 'thout the leastest trouble."

"Wait a moment," said Sharp. "I want to ask a few more questions. Is the captain here now?"

"Uml"

"How do you know? Have you seen him?"

"Uml seen him an' talked wid him?"

"When?"

"Bout half an hour ago."

"Do you know where his room is?"

"Course I do."

"Well, give it a wide berth. Now what do you want me to do?"

"Stay here till I go fur Joe."

"No you don't, sonny. I'm not quite such a fool as you think me."

"Ye'r growin' inter one very fast, Mister Dull."

"If I stay here you will doubtless go and bring the whole gang down onto me like an avalanche."

"Ef ye think that, Sharpy, ye kin kim along o' me, only ef ye git ketched, don't lay it ter me, that's all. The minit the Cap claps eyes onter yer phiz, ye'r a-goner, sure's yer name *ain't* Sharp."

The detective did not appear to notice the last insinuation made by the boy, but remained quiet for a moment.

"Suppose I do remain here while you go for Joe, what then?"

"Why, I'll fetch him here, see?"

"What good will that do? We will be obliged to go the other way again to get out."

"Naw we won't, either."

"Which way, then?"

"Right back over the track you kim here by."

"But even if we find the place where I fell through, how are we going to get back into the place above?"

"On the ladder."

"Ladder?"

"Yes. Joe an' I put a ladder down troo the hole when we went a-huntin' fur you, an' if suthin' ain't swallowed it, I s'pose it's there yet, see?"

"I see; yes. Chip, I am inclined to trust you."

"Ye don't say so! That's very kind of ye, Sharpy, seein' as how ye've gotter, ef ye want'er git out o' this 'ere place."

Sam bit his lip, rather confused, for he realized that the boy had spoken the truth.

"All right, Chip," he said presently; "you have got me there. I don't know any more about getting out of this place than a crow, and if you weren't here I would probably have to fight my way out, anyway, so go and find Joe and bring him here. I'll wait."

"Right here?"

"Yes, right here."

"Right ye be, Mister Sharp. Ye'r beginnin' ter talk sense now. When I git back, I'll put you an' Joe onto a little game I've got in my head that'll jest let ye bag th' hull caboodle of these fellers here as easy as rollin' off a log."

"What is it, Chip?"

"Ain't got no time ter tell ye now, Sharpy," replied the boy; "ye'll hev ter show yer confidence by waitin' till I kim back wid Joe. Ye kin bag th' hull lot 'cept the Cap; he's my special property, see?"

"What do you mean, Chip?" cried Sam, grasping the lad by the arm as he was about moving off. "I begin to suspect that there is more method in you than I at first supposed; in fact, that you are not what you seem to be."

"Ye'r wrong there, Sharpy. I'm jest w'ot I seem ter be jest now."

"What is that?"

"A young feller w'ot's got an ax ter grind, an' he's a-goin' ter grind it, an' don't you forgit it, either; see?"

With a little quick jerk, the boy pulled his arm away from the detective's grasp, and started away on a run up the corridor, saying as he did so:

"Keep yer word, Sharpy, an' wait where ye air, an' ye'll say yet thet Chip's a trump! Right ye be—right ye be!"

He traversed the entire part of the main gallery to where the one in which Joe was waiting ran into it, without meeting any of the counterfeiters, for it was just the time when they were at work at their plates and presses, and turning into the cross galley he hurried rapidly toward the point where he had left Joe.

"Joe—Joe!" he called, in a loud whisper, but there was no response, and Chip began to feel very nervous.

"Joe—Joe!" he repeated, and still no answer.

"What has become of him?" muttered the boy. "I must be very near to the place where I left him."

"Joe—Joe!"

The last call was as loud as he dared to make it, but no response came to him, but as he listened he fancied he could discern a faint sound.

Stooping, he applied his ear to the ground, and almost immediately arose to his feet, smiling broadly.

"Lucky I left him so far away from the main gallery," he said to himself, "for he's snoring like everything."

It was true. Joe had grown tired of waiting, and, worn out by the unusual exertions he had gone through with since he and Sharp had left the village, he had seated himself with his back against the rocky wall of the gallery and fallen into a deep slumber.

But when Chip crept up to him, guided by the noise, and placed his hand upon his arm and shook him, the sleeping man started quickly to his feet. The boy, however, remained quiet, waiting to hear what Joe would say.

"Where in blazes be I?" he exclaimed. "Thunder! but ain't it dark, though? Oh, I know! Now, where kin thet air Chip be?"

"Here, Joe," said Chip, out of the darkness; "I jest woke ye."

"Well, it's about time, I think. Great Scott, but ain't I hungry! Where've ye been, Chip?"

"Way to t'other side o' the cave. I took breakfast w'd th' fellers in there, and then I called on the boss."

"No! did ye?"

"Right ye be, Joe! I found suthin' too."

"W'ot?"

"Sharp."

"Eh?"

"That air detective Chap; he's waitin' fur us on t'other side o' the cave."

"How in creation did he git thar?"

"Froo anoder gallery."

"Well, let's be goin'. Kin we git around ter him without being seen?"

"I guess so; kim on."

And so, with the boy in the lead, they started onward stealthily.

The turn was made safely, and they were just passing the last point where Chip could feel that there was any danger, viz: the entrance to the gallery leading to the captain's room, when Quickeye emerged from his quarters.

He was evidently in a great hurry, for he was walking very rapidly.

Notwithstanding which fact, however, he came to an abrupt halt when he saw Chip.

"How is this?" he said, "why have you not started on your errand?"

CHAPTER XXII.

"EH, SHARPEY, D'YE SEE NOW?"

For the first instant when Chipmonk beheld Captain Quickeye approaching he felt that the game was played out; that the counterfeiter chief would at once recognize Joe as a stranger at least, and order them both put into the dungeon.

Just what horror such a calamity contained for the lad, cannot fully be appreciated now, but at heart he felt that he would far rather have perished in the black hole around which he and Joe had passed together, than that he should be captured and imprisoned by the man he was duping and afterward be subjected to the searching examination which he knew would fall to his lot.

While passing through the corridor he had taken the precaution to admonish Joe to keep as entirely in the shadow as possible, and luckily that was not a difficult matter in the cavern, where the lights were suspended so far apart, and at the moment when he first discovered the captain approaching they

happened to be in the very darkest spot that could be found—that is just midway between two lights.

"Don't speak, Joe; don't speak!" he managed to whisper hastily, and then when Quickeye asked him the question, he said, abruptly:

"Just again, an' I forgot ter ax yer if I was ter report to ye when I come in, or to jist git the men an' go ahead."

"I will give the necessary orders as I go out," replied the chief, "so you can just come in, take as many men as will be necessary and do the job. I will tell Barnes to boss the job for you. Who is that with you?" nodding his head to Joe, who had edged along past them and stood facing the opposite way.

"Caesar," replied Chip.

"All right," assented the captain, "I will be in my den to-night, and when all is done as I have directed, come and tell me; until then, I don't want to see you again," and without another word he hurried onward, leaving Joe and the boy to draw several deep breaths of great relief and thankfulness over their narrow escape.

"Not but w'ot I might hev downed him," said Joe as they went forward, "but ther leastest noise of a tussle w'd hev brought ther hull gang down onter us instanter."

All was plain sailing after that, and in a very few moments more they were with the detective.

Bidding the two men make haste, Chip hurried as fast as possible along the dark gallery until he considered it safe to relight a lantern.

Both Joe and Sam were nearly exhausted by their great exertions during the past few hours, and neither of them had eaten anything since the day before.

"Blowed ef I know which I'd ruther see," exclaimed Joe, "daylight 'r vittils."

"I would take the 'vittils' without any hesitation," replied Sharp.

They had no difficulty in reaching the ladder down which Joe and Chip had made their way when they first started in search of Sam, and in a very short time they had clambered up, pulling it out after them into the upper cave.

"Thar!" exclaimed the Vermonter. "I feel as though I'd got hum ag'in, an' in jest abaout a jiffy I'll hev suthin' smokin' over a fire."

The prisoner, Barnes, was found to be reduced to a state of terror bordering on madness, for he had really come to the conclusion that he had been left chained to the wall to starve.

He had tried with all his strength to get loose, but it was of no avail, and when the trio returned he was in a condition of abject despair.

"Relieve me from this horror," he said to Joe; "take this collar off my neck and release me, and I will answer any question you may put."

"Don't want any questions answered now," said Joe. "We've got all ther information we want, an' as we've got ter do a little talkin' right in yer presence, I think it's safer ter let ye stay whar ye be. Ye needn't git scart, fur yer won't be abandoned—not much! When we git ready ter go daown the maountain we'll take ye along, never fear."

"Naow, Samuel," he continued, as they were eating their breakfast, "we hev faound the counterfeiters' den in double quick order, I call it, an' es the feller said to ther boy who hed trapped a skunk, naow ye've got it, w'at'r ye a-goin' ter do with it, eh?"

"There is but one thing for me to do that I can see," replied the detective, "and that is to return to the city, report what we have discovered and bring a force back with me which will be sufficient to clean out this nest entirely. We are not enough in ourselves, that is certain; for from what Chip says, I am satisfied that there are at least ten men in there now, and they are all desperate characters who will fight to the last gasp. What is your opinion, Joe?"

"We-l-l," drawled Joe, as he leaned back and began filling his pipe. "I can't say I've got one; leastwise ef I hev, it's the same 's yourn. Chip, boy, you air fu'st rate at ideers; hev ye got one naow?"

"Right ye be, Joe!"

"What is it?"

"Mebby Sharpey don't want it; it ain't wuth much, p'raps."

"Let us hear it," said Sam. "It may suggest an idea, anyway."

"Fu'st 'n' foremost," said the lad, slowly, "I want ax some questions."

"Go ahead," said Joe.

"Right ye be! The fu'st one is: Do ye think ye kin stan' another scrimmage ter-night?"

"That depends," said Joe, "onter ther size 'n strength o' ther party."

"One o' the other party ag'inst you two fellows, an' me a-lookin' on an' bossin' ther job," grinned the boy.

"None of your chaff, boy!" exclaimed Sam, impatiently.

"Tain't chaff; it's clear grit, this is."

"Explain yourself, then."

"When ye've answered my question."

"Well, then—yes!"

"Right ye be! Now I'll tell ye su'thin'! When I left Joe down there, an' went on th' 'splorin' expedition, I hed a long confab wid the boss."

"Well, w'ot of it?"

"He hed seen us on the mountain together, an' wanted ter know who you was," nodding his head at Sharp.

"What did you say?"

"I sed ye was a-huntin' wid Joe, an' he wanted ter know w'ot ye war huntin', game 'r men—"

"And you told him, of course that I was hunting—"

"Men!"

"What!" cried the detective springing to his feet in a rage, "you betrayed me to him?"

"Um!" nodded the boy undismayed, and not attempting to avoid the angry man who was standing over him with arm uplifted, while even good-natured Joe had a savage frown upon his usually serene face. "I told him yer name wasn't Sam Sharp, 'though ye sed it was, an' thet ye was a detective chap from New York who hed kim up here on pu'pose ter ketch him an' ther boys!"

The perfect coolness with which Chipmonk made the statement had more effect upon Sam than anything else could, for he seated himself again and said:

"Well—well, Chip—I won't get angry until you have told me all there is to tell, for your face looks as though you had more to communicate."

"Right ye be, Sharpey—right ye be!"

"What did he say to your information?"

"Nothin'; he only laffed 's though 'twas a good joke, an' axed me where ye both were at that moment, but I told him I didn't know."

"He said he was sorry he'd hafter gobble Joe at the same time he did you, 'cos he sorter likes Joe, but he couldn' help it."

"Well! go on!"

"Then we put our heads together, he 'n me did, and I was ter j'ine ye ag'in, find out where ye air goin' ter camp ter-night, and then pilot th' hull b'ilin' down onter ye when ye're asleep, see? ye know ther rest, don't ye?"

Both Joe and Sam gazed at each other in dismay as they recognized how simple a thing it would have been for the boy to have betrayed them in the way he had named, if he had chosen to do so. They very plainly saw that they would have been entirely at Chipmonk's mercy if he had chosen to desert them, or even to remain true to the counterfeiters, for both men were satisfied that the boy had been connected with them intimately all along.

"You are a strange boy," muttered Sam; "I can't make you out!"

"Can't ye?"

"No, but I am going to try before long. Now, tell us what you are going to do in place of carrying out the plan arranged by Quickeye."

"Nothin'."

"Nothing?"

"No—there is nothin' in th' place of it."

"Boy, I want you to distinctly understand that I will have no more of your trifling; tell me plainly what you mean."

"I mean thet I'm a-goin' ter carry out ther plan perzactly es he fixed it; I mean that about dusk I'm a-goin' ter his cave, an' I'm a-goin' ter tell him whar ye're campin' to a dot. I mean thet I am a goin' ter see ther every man belonging ter thet gang is

armed ter his eyes, and then I'm a-goin' ter fetch th' hull b'ilin' right here ter this cave whar we air now, an' when I git 'em here—"

"You young traitor!" cried Sharp, seizing Chipmonk by the shoulder and shaking him roughly, but Joe interposed quickly.

"Don't ye see, Sam, thet ther boy's givin' us fair warnin'?"

"What of that!" cried the detective; "it gives them warning too, and they'll fly away like a partridge."

"No they won't, neither!" interrupted Chip.

"Why not? What is to prevent them?"

"You are!"

"We are? How?"

"'Cos, instead of gobblin' you, ye'll gobble them, don't ye see? They'll hev ter kim over the rock one at-ter time, same's we did, see? An' when they land, they're gobbled, see? Eh, Sharpey, d'ye see, now?" and the lad laughed gleefully.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SETTING THE TRAP.

LIKE a revelation Chipmonk's whole scheme betrayed itself in those few words, and Sharp looked at the boy wonderingly and admiringly as he realized the possibilities which lay in the fruition of the boy's plan.

By the aid of Joe and the boy he could capture the whole gang, then return to the cavern, secure the evidence necessary for their conviction, march his prisoners to the station, and from thence to the nearest city containing an adequate prison, with the consciousness of having accomplished a wonderful thing in the eyes of the world, besides winning the reward offered.

The boy's idea, as further explained by himself in his own quaint way, was as follows:

He would return to the counterfeiters cave about sundown and get the entire force together, telling them that the men they were after were camped in another cave further along the mountain-side; that he had left them, ostensibly to return to the village, and that therefore the two victims would be sleeping soundly in the absence of all fear of molestation.

The counterfeiters would provide themselves with a means of descending to the ledge where Joe had nearly lost his life, and Chip would undertake to so arrange it that not more than one at a time could go down the ladder, or rope, which ever might be used.

Joe and Sam were to be in waiting at the bottom, and when the first comer reached them they were to seize him instantly, stopping his mouth so that he could not cry out and give the alarm, and then they were to compel him at the point of a knife to call out softly to his friends above that all was right, when they had fixed him so that he could not get away.

Thus, one by one, the counterfeiters were to walk into the trap laid for them, where they were to be seized and bound like so many wild animals.

Joe had plenty of rope for the purpose in his little retreat, and the only drawbacks consisted in the possible noise made by the men as they were seized, and the time consumed in the necessary struggle and in binding them securely enough so that they could not get away.

It was a desperate and hazardous undertaking, but both Joe and Sam were made of the sort of stuff which does not hesitate at obstacles, and each felt confident that the plans could be carried out without fail.

Poor Barnes had to sit there and listen to the scheming against his companions, all the time. Many and many were the scathing denunciations which he poured upon Chipmonk's devoted head for his treachery and falseness in betraying his pals, as he called them, but the boy paid no attention, seldom troubling himself to reply, evidently not feeling in the slightest degree conscience-stricken over what he had done and was about to do.

"There's one thing ye hain't thought of," he said finally to Sharp.

"What is that?"

"Ther boss—the captain."

"Yes I have, my lad. Why?"

"'Cos he ain't comin' wid the others."

"What is he going to do?"

"He's a-goin' ter stay right in his little den an' wait 'till I git back wid ther men an' you fellers, an' then I am ter go ter him an' report."

"Ah! I see. Then when we get the job done here, we will be obliged to go there after him, eh?"

"Um!" nodded the boy.

Sharp was silent. There were many reasons why he liked that arrangement much better than if the captain had chosen to accompany his men, but he did not care to make them public even to his two friends, nor did he deem it necessary.

The idea of bearding the lion in his den, after first destroying his gang of counterfeiters, was extremely pleasant to Sam Sharp, for it offered a solution to one problem which had puzzled him most, ever since they had agreed upon a course of procedure.

"I will have him alone, when assistance is not at hand, and then I can repay the debt between us," muttered the detective under his breath, but not so low but what the boy Chipmonk caught the words.

He started a little, and for an instant looked gravely at Sharp, and then said:

"Ye kin pay yer debt all right enough, Sharpey, but ye'll hev ter fight ter do it. He's gotter nigger there that's as strong as an ox."

"Cannot we decoy the negro out?"

"Mebby so; 'tain't likely, though."

"We can try."

"Yes—but that ain't the hardest job."

"What is, then?"

"Gittin' in at all."

"How so?"

Chip then explained how the door was built, and how careful the negro was never to allow any one only so far, upon any pretext what ever.

"I only see one way out of it," said Sharp finally, "and that depends upon you."

"On me?"

"Yes."

"What kin I do?"

"When our work is done here, we will leave the men and go to the cave together. Then you will go to the chief to make your report. Do you follow me?"

"Um!"

"You will tell him that the trip was successful in every particular and that the men are captured, and he will then do one of two things."

"What two?"

"He will either come right out into the other part of the cave to see what sort of a creature I am, or he will dismiss you, and wait until later for the view. If he comes out with you, Joe and I can lay in wait for him and so capture him."

"S'posen he waits?"

"Then, in that case, as you come out after being dismissed, you must tell the negro that his master wishes him to perform some service or other which will take him from his post. When he is once away from the door and in one of the galleries of the outer cave he will be at our mercy."

Chipmonk shook his head.

"Ther last plan won't work, Sharpey," he said, decidedly. "Ther nigger 's too fly. He'll smell a mice instanter, an' go straight back an' ax ther boss ef them orders is straight, an' then ther hull jig's up."

"Well," said Sam after pausing a moment or two in deep thought. "Let me hear what idea you have to propose. Your last one was certainly a good one; perhaps you can now see a way out of this difficulty."

But the boy shook his head dubiously. He had no suggestions to offer.

"I'll tell ye w'ot's w'ot," broke in Joe suddenly; "we've got about four hours 'tween naow an' sundown, an' I, fur one, propose thet we spend ther time in snoozin', an' mebbly some of us'll dream o' su'thin' wuth w'ile."

The suggestion met with evident favor all around, nor did their tired bodies need rocking, for they were soon snoring loudly—all except the captive Barnes, who was forced to remain there, chained to the wall like a wild beast, while his friends were being led into a trap which would place them all beyond the reach of law-breaking for many years to come.

But every time he moved he would feel the cold nose of Pomp pressed against some

portion of his body in a mute argument against endeavoring to escape, and he knew that all thought of freedom for him was fruitless. His only hope was that none of the sleepers would awake in time to carry out their plans, and that in the twenty-four hours which must ensue in that case, something might turn up.

He had heard enough to know that the two caverns connected; to know that if he could once get free from the chain which bound him to the wall, from the hated, detestable collar about his neck, he could fly through the short passage to the Round Marble, drop through the hole, and then trust to luck to reach his friends.

Oh, if he could burst his bonds! If only that terrible dog would remain away long enough for him to try again.

Concealed in his stocking was a piece of a file which he had found on the floor near him and which had been brought there unseen by Joe, among a lot of nails, and when discovered, cast idly upon the floor.

If he could only get a chance to use it he might escape, and so warn his companions.

And so, hoping almost against hope, he, too, fell into a disturbed slumber, in which his dreams conjured up all sorts of horrible visions of prison cells.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE STRENGTH OF DESPERATION.

The slumber which came over the captive Barnes, though much disturbed by unpleasant dreams, was nevertheless sound, and he continued to sleep on and on, long after the others were astir.

But at last he opened his eyes; opened them upon a darkness so dense, that not an object was discernible.

He listened attentively, but not a sound broke the stillness, and his heart bounded with joy, for he felt convinced that he was alone.

"They are gone!" he whispered, hoarsely. "Have they taken that brute of a dog with them, or is he still here, watching me? I do not see his eyes anywhere," and he rattled his chain loudly.

Pomp, however, was at that moment out on the ledge with Joe and Sam, Chipmonk having just departed to carry out his part of the programme.

Barnes made several little noises calculated to rouse the dog if he were in the cavern chamber with him, and his pulse beat feverishly when he became satisfied that he was indeed alone.

With a sob of nervousness he fell upon his knee and began rapidly unlacing his shoe.

It took him less than a moment to tear the shoe and stocking from his foot, but the seconds sped like minutes and the time thus necessarily spent seemed endless to him in his great impatience.

But at last it was done; at last the moment had arrived when he was free from the observation of man or beast, and when he held in his trembling fingers the means of freeing himself from the terrible chain which held him to the great black wall, so many feet under the surface of the ground.

With wildly-beating heart, and nerves strained to their utmost, the counterfeiter began filing at one of the links which composed the chain.

The file, or rather, the piece of file, was old and nearly worn out, and therefore did not cut the iron very fast, but the links were not large, and the man worked with a strength and swiftness born of desperation and supernatural nervous energy.

The minutes seemed like hours to him, and often he would pause and listen intently for a moment, thinking he had heard the sound of his enemies returning, or the low growl of Pomp, who had perhaps discovered what was going on.

Nearly half an hour had gone by since he began filing, and still he worked on, never once slackening the terrible haste.

His hands were blistered and bleeding, where he had cut them with the file, but he did not even know it. All his thoughts were upon the parting of the chain which held him.

Suddenly he almost cried out with joy, for the file had passed through the link.

Quickly inserting it in the ring, he pried outward with a strength he had never before

possessed, so that the two ends made by the file were sprung far enough part for the connecting link to slip through, and in an instant more he was free.

Never stopping for his shoe, which had been left where he had torn it off when searching for the file, he started toward that part of the chamber where he knew the opening into the passageway was.

The long habit of living the greater part of his time in a cave had rendered it easier for him to get about than for those less used to it, and he had no difficulty in finding the gallery.

Along that he hurried, with one hand tracing his course by the wall.

"Oh, if I can only reach that hole before they discover me—before the dog smells my scent," he cried in his heart; but his lips remained tightly clinched together as he hurried onward, and surging in him at that moment was the desperation which would have unhesitatingly struggled and fought with even Pomp in that wild burst for liberty.

Suddenly he paused.

"What if I pass the Round Marble, and rush out upon them where they are, at the—no, I can't, for there is a ladder between us."

"Ah!" he cried, as his thoughts went on, "why cannot I find the ladder and take it away, thus cutting off their means of pursuing me? I can! I will!"

On—on, through the darkness he went, still keeping his hand upon the wall.

All at once he ran plump against something with a force that stunned him for an instant.

Putting out his hand to discover the cause, he saw that he had come in contact with a sharp angle in the rocky sides of the cavern.

"This must be where the ladder is," he muttered, and began feeling around in the black darkness for it.

"Yes, I am not mistaken!" he cried under his breath as his hand came in contact with the hard beechwood limbs. "Here it is! Now we will see who wins this struggle!"

With almost gigantic strength he raised it and lowered it slowly to the floor at his side, for it was as much as Joe could do to move the heavy article.

"Now to find the hole they spoke of and get this there," he thought.

"He remembered that when they brought him there, the Round Marble was but a little way from the point where they had descended by the ladder, and striking out boldly without guiding himself by the wall this time, he sought to reach the spot, knowing that if he still clung to the side of the cavern he would again pass it in the darkness.

It never occurred to him that he might fall through the hole; he was too greatly excited to think of that; his sole object was to find the right place, locate it in the darkness, and then return for the ladder.

He would then lower it through the hole, and taking it down there after him, cut off all means of pursuit for a time sufficiently long at least to allow him to escape.

So he stumbled forward hurriedly, spasmodically, until suddenly his forward foot failed to strike the cavern floor, and with a loud, startled cry, he fell headlong.

But as he fell, he threw out his hands desperately clutching the rock on the other side of the floor, and then he hung there, swinging back and forth like the pendulum of a clock, knowing not how far he had to fall if he loosed his hold, or upon what he might alight.

Exerting himself to his utmost, he sought to regain the floor above, but his strength had already been tried beyond his powers of endurance and he quickly saw that the attempt was useless.

Again and again he tried, but with no better success, and all the while he was growing weaker and weaker with the mad effort.

Finally his fingers began to slip, and he knew that he could hold on no longer; knew that the moment had come when he must let go and drop to the unknown bottom beneath him.

With a shiver of fear he relaxed his hands, dropping like a stone through the darkness, landing upon the bottom of the lower gallery as a clod of earth flung by a fork, and lying there senseless and still.

It was more fright, however, which rendered him senseless, than the real effects of the concussion, for presently he opened his

eyes and for a second, wondered where he was.

But not for long, for in a rush of recollection it all came back upon him, and he started to his feet and rushed blindly away through the darkness until he came in collision with the wall and was thrown violently back.

But he regained his feet quickly, and putting his hand upon the wall as he had done in the cave above, started onward again, blind and bleeding.

He had become almost mad. He only knew that he was fleeing from a fate he dreaded worse than death. All thought of his companions in danger had fled from him, and he was thinking only of himself; only of his own chances of escape, and so he went on and on, blindly, madly, desperately.

Every now and then he struck against a projecting rock, or, catching his foot in an unevenness in the floor, stumbled and fell, but he raised himself and sped onward again as though pursued by the furies of Hades.

There was scarcely a spot on his body which was not bruised or bleeding from a wound, but he never thought of them—only of escape—escape.

Would he succeed? Would he reach his companions in time to warn them of their danger? In time, even, to save his chief, if not the others?

CHAPTER XXV.

BAITED AND READY TO SPRING.

THE expedition on hand, which Chipmonk had projected, lay heavily upon his mind, and although greatly fatigued, he did not sleep soundly, waking many times during the four hours they had allowed themselves for rest.

At last, his restlessness could bear the suspense no longer, and he roused Joe by heartily shaking him, and telling him that it was time they were making preparations for the anticipated coup.

Joe sprung up nimbly, giving the detective a sharp punch at the same time, and soon they were all astir.

As has been stated, Joe had plenty of rope in the cave, besides that which had been used for the three captives already taken. Moreover, Sharp had two pair of handcuffs, which could be utilized.

Their first work was to cut the rope in proper lengths, tying a slip-knot in one end of each piece so that their would be no more delay than was absolutely necessary in securing the hands and feet of their victims. Then both the detective and Joe provided themselves with short cudgels which were not to be used unless absolutely necessary, but which were nevertheless of sufficient weight to effectually silence a person if applied to his head with adequate force.

"Joe," said Sam Sharp, as they were working together, "this is a very tough job we have got on hand, and one which may prove disastrous to one or all of us. Before we go into it I want to relate a little story to you, so if anything happens to me you can carry out the remainder of the work I have to do."

"My name, as you have suspected, is not Sam Sharp, that being only a cognomen which I adopted for this occasion, for my real name is too well known among the crooked fraternity, and particularly among those belonging to this class, for me to be safe for a moment, had they learned that I was in search of them."

Joe nodded, saying briefly:

"Ye needn't tell ther real one onless ye want; Sam's good enough fur me, an' besides mebbey ye don't want Chip an' ther feller chained ter th' wall ter hear; we ain't aout of the muddle yet by a long shot."

"Very true," replied Sharp; "and it is for that reason that I want you to know it. The man at the wall is sleeping so soundly that he won't hear what I have to say, and as for Chip—well, my opinion of him has undergone a change, and I don't mind his hearing what I have to say, in the least."

"Right ye be!" murmured Chip, drawing nearer; "I think ye're a brick, Sharpey, whatever yer handle is, see?"

Sam smiled pleasantly as he laid his hand on the boy's shoulder, and said:

"I was once no ignorant lad, like you, Chip, with no idea who my parents were; in fact I don't know that, now, but I have an adopted father and mother whom I love

with all the strength of my being, for they educated me and made a man of me, just as I will do by you, my boy, if you will let me."

"God bless you, sir!" murmured Chip, while a great sob welled up in his throat, not for what the detective had said he would do, so much as for the kindness which prompted the words, and the good they might have done for any lad who might have been so placed.

"My right name is Harry Gordon," continued Sam (we will continue to call him Sam throughout the story, as the others did,) "and when a boy like you I was called Mosquito."

"Years ago I knew this man who now calls himself Quickeye, and he knew me, but time has wrought more changes in my appearance than in his, so that when he saw me not so very long ago, he had no idea that I was in any way connected with his past life."

"I adopted this profession because I loved it, and because I felt that I possessed a particular capability for it, and I have never been sorry."

"Here is a paper bearing the address of those whom I call my parents, and should aught happen to me, let them know about it."

"Now, Chip"—glancing at his watch—"it is time for you to be going, so we will go to the mouth of the cave together, and then you can up and away."

Without a word Chip grasped as much of the paraphernalia as he could carry and led the way down the passage, the others following with what was left, together with the lantern, while Joe, casting a glance of mingled compassion and determination at the sleeping form of Barnes, signified to Pomp to follow on, and brought up the rear.

The ladder which Joe had pieced out had to be drawn from the hall leading to the lower gallery and carried to the point where it was necessary to climb in order to get out of the cave, and then the dogs had to be assisted up it, for Joe did not want to go through with the work on hand without his faithful animals close by, to render assistance if it should prove necessary.

Then the ladder which had been thrown down by the Virginian in his effort to destroy Joe, was raised to its position, and with a wave of the hand, young Chipmonk went up, soon disappearing from view over the top of the cliff.

Down in the valley where the cattle browsed, and all was peaceful and undisturbed, the sun had set, but on the mountain where our friends were, it was still tipping each leaf with gold and dodging the shadows among the boughs.

The lad paused upon a promontory overlooking the 'Derry Valley, from which he could see Lowell Lake lying still and placid in the mountain's lap, and could his late companions have seen what he did there, they would have been filled with wonder.

He clasped his hands together and sunk upon his knees among the clouds, and amidst the solitude of the mountain-tops, remaining with uplifted eyes and silently moving lips, for many moments.

Then he arose, and brushing back the tears which welled up to his eyes, he once more started on toward the counterfeiters' cave.

Truly, Chipmonk had developed into a strange lad, of late.

As he hurried onward, realizing what he had to do, his great, somber black eyes fairly blazed with excitement and hope, and yet behind all their sparkle dwelt an expression of tender concern which would never have been sought for in a lad like him.

By-and-by the bush-entrance of the cave was reached, and he went into the little room near the opening where he had so astonished Sharp but two nights before, and striking a light, began tearing away a pile of leaves in one corner.

A little of that, however, seemed to satisfy him, for presently he murmured:

"Thank Heaven, they are safe!"

Then he put the leaves back where they had been, and extinguishing the light, went out again into the gallery, turning toward the inner part of the cave.

It did not take him long to reach the great chamber where the men congregated, and as he had expected, they were at supper.

After refusing anything to eat, he asked one of them if the captain had given them any instructions as to the work they were to do that night.

"He has," replied the counterfeiter, "but we're a leetle doubtful. Ye see, Chip, me an' Tom have been lookin' all over the blessed mountain fur ye ter-day, but narry a hide nor hair could we find."

"Ye an' Tom air fules!" replied Chip disdainfully, "'cos ef ye'd found us, ye'd have spoiled ther hull thing. 'Tain't much wonder ye didn't find us though, 'cos we war in a cave."

"A cave!"

"Yes—a cave! D'ye know w'ot er cave is? It's a hole in ther ground."

"Is there another cave on this 'ere maountain?" asked another of the men.

"There be," said Chip, "an' that's whar I've gotter take ye, see? 'Tain't nigh so big's this 'un, but it's big enough fur the purpose."

"Whar is it, Chip?"

"'Bout a quarter of a mile from here. Ye'll hev ter slide down a rope over ther edge o' ther cliff ter git into it, an' one at a time, too, an' I don't b'lieve mor'n half of ye's got ther grit."

"Ye don't, eh?"

"Naw, I don't, eh?"

"Wal, ye jist take us there an' ye'll see."

"Oh! I'll take ye there!" exclaimed Chip, with a fine scorn in his voice, "'cos thet's w'ot I promised ther Cap I'd do, an' when I've done that, th' 'sponsibility's yourn, not mine. All I've got ter do arter thet's ter report ter th' Cap, see?"

"What is the matter, Chip?" asked one who had not spoken before, "you're 's cross 's two sticks to-night."

"Am I? Well, I'll tell ye w'ot's ther matter. I don't like ther job o' settin' nigh onter a dozen cut-throats like ye air, ag'in' a couple o' sleepin' fellers w'ot's been good ter me, see?"

"Haw—haw—haw! Ye'r' gittin' squeamish, ain't ye, Chip?"

"W'ot ef I am—it's none o' your business. I'm a-goin' ter see th' Cap, an' when I kim back, I'll take ye ter the spot, ef ye'r' ready."

"The cap'n won't see ye, Chip."

"Why not?"

"'Cos he ain't there."

"Where is he?"

"Don't know; gone out; said he'd be back by the time we was."

"Bet a dollar I know where he is," said the lad after a moment of silence.

"Whar?"

"Gone ter keep an eye onter you fellers, ter see thet ye do ther job O. K., see?"

The men glanced at one another nervously, for Captain Quickeye had been known to do that thing before, when he had given particular orders regarding a special case.

"Where's Caesar?" asked Chip suddenly, looking around for that individual.

"Ain't showed up fur two days," replied the one who had done the most talking.

"The Cap's got it in fur him, sure's yer born—him an' the others what went with him. The Cap sent 'em out on an errand o' some sort an' I guess they've skipped. Mebby he's a lookin' fur them."

"Mebby so."

The men began to busy themselves preparing for the expedition they had on hand, and which, truth to say, they none of them enjoyed, particularly since the boy had told them about going down over the edge of the cliff.

They secured a stout rope in which they tied knots at a distance of a foot apart to use in the descent, Chip informing them that there was a ladder in the cave which they could use in getting out.

At last all was in readiness, and it was found to be high time for them to start, for darkness had long since settled over the earth, and they thought their two victims were by that time steeped in slumber.

"Nine of ye, all told," said Chip, looking at them just before they started. "Mebby, ef ye'r' all on yer muscle ter-night, ye kin git away wid two fellers w'ot's fast asleep."

Without more ado he led the way out of the cave.

The trap was baited, and nearly ready to spring.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A FATAL PLUNGE—NIBBLING THE BAIT.

WE left Barnes rushing madly through the dark gallery in the great effort to escape the fate prepared for the counterfeiters by Joe and Sam Sharp.

He had been buffeted about by the sharp and jagged rocks with which he had come in contact until his poor body was covered with wounds and bruises, but still he rushed onward, totally heedless of everything except the danger from which he was fleeing.

Every nerve of his body was writhing in the grasp of Infinite Terror as he sped onward, pursued by a thousand fancied horrors, each one a hundred times more horrible in his imagination than the real one.

He was reaping the harvest sprung from the seeds of wrong-doing; the whirlwind of retribution was sweeping down upon him, bearing him away like a feather.

Joe and Sam, with Pomp at their feet, sitting idly upon the rocky ledge at the mouth of the cave, had no idea that their prisoner had escaped, but thought him securely pinioned to the wall where they had left him, and yet, as he fled wildly along the cavern, he fancied that he could bear the rush of the bloodhound upon his track and almost feel his hot breath steaming behind him, while in a moment more the terrible fangs would be deeply buried in his quivering flesh.

On—on—on! Faster! faster, and still faster—panting like a hunted stag, and yet struggling blindly for liberty.

Suddenly throughout the dark gallery of the black cavern there rung out one long, fearful, petrifying scream; a scream that seemed to make the very rocks shudder; that pierced the darkness like a knife.

Then followed an instant of silence, and then a loud splash as if some heavy body had fallen into water, and after that all was still and silent as if no foreign echoes had ever awakened the solitude of the cave.

The fleeing man, in that wild dash for liberty, had plunged headlong into the same black hole around which Joe and the boy Chipmonk had made their way so perilously.

His struggles were over; his days of wrong-doing were ended; the sun had gone down over the years he had lived, and he was gone to answer for his sins; gone to render up a last strict account of what he had done with the life intrusted to his keeping, the use of which he had so willfully perverted.

No one ever knew his fate, although Joe and Sam surmised it.

As intently as possible the nine counterfeiters sent out to capture Joe and Sam Sharp followed the boy who was guiding them through the woods toward the spot where the detective and his companions were lying in wait to receive them.

It could not have been rightly termed a dark night, and yet, down among the trees where they were, it was almost impossible to get along without occasionally colliding with a limb, or coming in unpleasant contact with the branches of a fallen tree, so that it required much more time than to traverse the distance of a quarter of a mile.

No one broke the silence with his voice. Chip had warned them all to be still.

At last the cliff was reached and young Chipmonk paused upon the edge where the moon could strike him, and pointing over into the darkness, said in an undertone:

"Here's th' place. Ther cave's right 'n under our feet, an' ther ledge where th' entrance is, 's only 'bout ten 'r twelve feet below. Who's th' fu'st man ter go down?"

But, though the boy turned his moonlit face from one to another of the men until he had peered into the countenance of each, not a man answered.

It required nerve to make the descent over the edge of an unknown cliff in the darkness, and while all were willing to go, no one cared to lead the way. It was safer to wait until some one else had ventured, and they could hear from his lips that all was well.

"Bah!" exclaimed the boy with supreme disdain; "there oughter be ninety of yer 'stead o' nine. There ain't one o' ye w'ot's got grit enough ter tackle an' ole scarecrow. One o' ye jist make the end o' thet rope fast ter a tree an' I'll lead ther way myself. But understand, the hull crowd o' ye, thet when

I git down there, I ain't a-goin' ter do another thing, 'cept ter stiddy ther rope, and show ye the way inside when ye've all landed, an' ef ye don't come, why it's none o' my biz, 'cos it's you who'll hev ter 'splain ter the boss, not me."

While he was talking, the rope had been made fast as he had suggested, and he took hold of it and let himself partly over the side.

"Now, look here, you fellers," said Chipmonk, pausing with his head and shoulders above the edge of the cliff, while one hand grasped the rope, and the other was shaking ominously at the men, "we don't want no foolin'. When I git down, an' find all's serene, I'll give ther line er shake, see? Then I'll stiddy it while one o' you kim down; then I'll lead him back onto ther ledge where he won't be scart ter death fur fear o' fallin' off, an' then I'll shake ther line ag'in fur ther next feller, see? Don't anybody try ter foller his leader till I shake ther line, 'cos ye might git two on it ter onc't, an' ef ther thing sh'd bu'st—well, it's about a billion feet ter the bottom see?"

Without another word he let his body disappear from view, but he wanted to say something that would post Joe and Sam as to who was coming first, forgetting that they could see him perfectly well against the sky as he descended, so he paused again, and said in an undertone, yet one which he knew they could all hear perfectly well:

"When ye report this thing to the boss, don't forgit ter till him thet Chipmonk went fu'st, will ye?"

No reply was made, and he went on down the knotted rope, landing safely at the bottom, where Joe grasped his little hand and shook it heartily.

He wanted to tell him that he was a brick, but it was not policy even to whisper, for fear the men at the top might hear and thus spoil their plans entirely.

As soon as Chip was free of the rope, he grasped it and gave it a vigorous shake, and then stepped backward so as to be out of the way, for he fully realized that his comparative strength was as nothing in the game that was about to be played.

Full two minutes elapsed before there was the slightest indication that any one meant to come down the rope. The low murmur of voices could be heard, as the men on top of the cliff endeavored to persuade each other that any one but themselves should descend first.

Finally, however, when Joe and Sam and Chip had begun to fear that the men were going to back out, the rope trembled, and each knew that the first comes was on his way to imprisonment.

It was Joe instead of Chip, who was steadying the rope; Joe, whose long arms were as unrelenting and firm as a band of steel; whose broad shoulders and full deep chest told of such massive strength; which had been sufficient to lay the Virginian on his back in the first encounter, and the Virginian was counted a giant among his associates.

The seconds went by, and slowly the counterfeiter made his way down the knotted rope.

Joe had drawn Chip forward and told him to touch the man's arm and direct him just a little way back so as to clear the rope, and the boy did so.

The outlaw felt greatly relieved when the boy's hand touched him; he felt assured that he was not descending into some awful pit from which there was no escaping.

"You, Chip?" he asked in a soft whisper.

"Ye—up!" responded Chip, and he directed the man back into the darkness.

Two steps was all that he was allowed to take however, for a great, powerful hand was clapped over his mouth, an arm like the coil of a boa encircled his neck; a knee was thrust roughly against the small of his back, and he was borne to the earth as silently and swiftly as though hit with a sand-bag.

Upon the instant that he went down the noose of one of the ropes was thrown over his feet, drawn tightly and made fast, while a voice whispered in his ear:

"If you make a sound, I'll cut your throat from ear to ear," and a little pricking sensation in the region of his windpipe convinced the victim that it was best to obey implicitly.

It did not take half a minute to bind him

securely, for they had everything in perfect readiness, even to a gag which was thrust into his mouth, and then they laid him upon the rocks with another injunction that if he valued his life, he must not endeavor to make a sound.

Then the rope was again shaken.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TRAP SPRINGS.

AFTER shaking the rope the second time, an instant of waiting ensued, and then a voice came softly from overhead.

"All right?" it asked.

"Sh-h!" replied Chip; "yes."

In another moment the line began to tremble again, and the second counterfeiter was on his way down.

He came more rapidly than the first one, having seen two precede him, and received the assurance that all was right, but they were ready for him, for the same procedure was gone through with, ending in the same manner, and soon two of the outlaws were stretched side by side at the rear of the ledge.

Thus far, their plans had been entirely successful.

Not a sound had broken the stillness of the night that was in any way calculated to warn the counterfeiters overhead of the existence of the trap into which they were so blindly precipitating themselves.

It may seem strange that men used to dangers and hardships, men who invariably carried their lives upon their coat-sleeves, and were from the very nature of their trade supposed to be fearless as well as muscular, could be captured and bound as they were, almost without a struggle, and without uttering a sound of warning to their comrades, but the circumstances were such as to militate strongly against them.

In the first place, the descent over the face of the cliff in the middle of a dark night was in itself appalling, and the darkness above was as nothing when compared with the blackness beneath the cliff where they landed upon the ledge; and when one of the men braced himself for the ordeal of climbing down the rope, he had very little nerve left for coping with an unseen enemy whose numbers he could in no way determine, and whose strength as it seized him seemed prodigious.

The men, when seized by Joe's powerful arms, struggled but for the briefest instant, and then feeling themselves bound and helpless, and with the sharp point of a knife pricking their skin, had no idea of ending their own existence for the mere sake of warning their friends. The fear upon them was too great; the sense of awe too overpowering, and the surprise and wonder too overwhelming for much resistance to be possible.

Then the third one started, and he proved to be the hardest customer they had as yet been forced to deal with.

He was a short, chunky muscular fellow who was made of the stuff that loves to fight, and when he felt himself seized by Joe, he kicked up his feet like a rocket, catching Sharp under the chin and sending him sprawling upon his back as though he had been struck with a club.

He tried to call out, but Joe's hard right hand was pressed tightly over his lips, and he could make no sound.

But he had nerve and strength both, and although the Vermonter's left arm was pulling him backward with the strength of a steam derrick—although a hard, unyielding knee was pressed into his back, the tough spine refused to bend, and he writhed and twisted and squirmed, trying to call out; endeavoring with all his power to get his fingers into his mouth.

Nevertheless, he was doomed to the same fate as the others, for it did not take long for Sharp to regain his feet and take a hand once more in the scrimmage.

He succeeded after a great effort in locking the handcuffs around the man's wrists, and then tried to get a rope upon his feet, but they refused to allow that little attention to be paid them.

Joe was holding him as best he could, but was at considerable disadvantage, owing to the fact that he had to keep the fellow's mouth covered.

The man struggled so that neither of them could use the knife as a means of argument,

but finally Joe began to lose his temper, and with a motion as quick as the spring of a cat, he took his hand from the counterfeiter's mouth and struck him a terrific blow behind the ear with his clinched fist.

It was almost like being hit by a hammer and the fellow went down like a log, but not before he had given loud utterance to one oath of defiance.

In an instant more his feet were bound and his hands tied, the handcuffs being removed for another emergency.

Then a gag was quickly placed in his mouth so that he could not repeat his exclamation.

But short and brief as was the fight, the men on top had grown impatient, and then when the exclamation came, a low murmuring could be heard overhead.

"What's ther matter?" asked one of them, lying on his face and sticking his head over as he whispered the question.

"Nothin'," said Chip, reassuringly, "only his nob's was so awkward thet he stumbled over me an' then swore about it. Hurry up, you fellows, 'cos at this rate, we won't be ready ter do the job afore ter-morrow night."

The head disappeared, and presently the fourth victim came over.

He proved an easy customer, and was very quickly disposed of, as he offered no resistance at all.

Then the fifth and sixth followed in like manner.

"Whew!" murmured Joe; "talk erbaout work—this 'ere's wu'ss 'n chopplin' wood fur a livin'."

His body was wet with perspiration, and his nose was bleeding from a sharp blow received from the back of the head of one of the counterfeiters, while Sam's jaw was so sore from the effects of the kick he had received that he could scarcely move it.

They both congratulated themselves that the job was nearly finished, and that they were succeeding much better than they had hoped.

The six prisoners they had already taken were lying in a row fifteen or eighteen feet away, and they were standing in readiness for the seventh, who was at that moment on his way down.

All went well until he was about four feet from the bottom, when he paused and said:

"Whar's ther bottom, eh?"

"Jest a leetle funder," replied Chip.

"Whar's the other fellers, Chip?"

"Jest inside ther cave, takin' it easy!" returned the boy; "there ain't room fur more'n two 't a time here, an' so I jest drag 'em in there 'n leave 'em, see?"

"Say, Chip," continued the fellow, "don't ye think thar's enough of us down there, eh?"

"Naw, I don't."

"Why not?"

"'Cos, I want ther hull lot of ye."

"Well, the others say they won't come."

"They do, eh?"

"Yeup; an' I ain't comin' either."

"Ye're a liar!" broke in Joe's voice in a hoarse whisper, and seizing the man by the legs, he dragged him from the rope in the twinkling of an eye.

As he fell, he cried out, but that was the only sound he made, for his head struck the hard rock with a dull, hollow sound, and he did not move or make a noise after that.

They fixed him as they had fixed the others, and again the rope was shaken, but minute after minute went by, and the eighth man refused to materialize.

"Them other two fellers ain't a-comin'!" muttered Joe; "I guess we'll hev ter go after 'em, eh, Sam?"

"Not if we can entice them down here and capture them as we have the others," returned Sam.

They waited patiently until all were convinced that the remaining two did not mean to join their companions, and then Joe asked Chip if he thought he could do anything to bring them down if he went up and spoke to them.

But for once the boy hung back.

"No," he said, "I don't b'lieve I c'u'd fetch 'em, an' besides, I can't go up thet air rope."

Joe was astounded. He had never known the boy to be afraid of anything before.

"Take off yer shoes, Chip," he said in a

whisper, "an' it's 's easy as rollin' off er log. Ye kin shin up there like er cat."

But the lad said no, and admitted that he was afraid to make the attempt.

He tried the experiment of calling to them, but it was of no avail, for they refused to answer.

Both Joe and Sam were nonplused. Their scheme for capturing the counterfeiters was worth nothing unless it entirely succeeded. It they were to capture a few, allowing the chief and a handful of his men to escape, it would be like breaking off a weed in one's garden, leaving the root to send out new shoots with additional abundance.

"I'm a-goin' up myself," said Joe, decidedly. "I kin keep 'em both busy till ye git thar, Sam, and then, ef we can't handle two cut-throats like them, we'd better quit altogether, an' do as Chip has done, flunk the hull bizness."

Without another word on the subject, the big Vermonter pulled off his boots and seizing the rope, began the ascent.

He had accomplished something more than half the distance when a head was thrust over the cliff, trying in vain to peer down into the darkness below.

"Who's comin' up?" asked its owner

"Me," was Joe's rather indefinite response.

"Who's 'me?'" repeated the voice.

"Me's me!" replied Joe.

"What yer comin' fur?"

"Fur you."

This conversation upon both sides had been carried on in a whisper, and during it, Joe had continued to ascend.

By the time he made the last reply, he was close enough to the counterfeiter to reach him, and seizing the rope in his left hand as tightly as he could, he thrust out his right, grasping the man above him by his hair and pulling him toward him with a violent effort.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A FIERCE FIGHT.

WHEN Joe seized the hair belonging to the head leaning over the cliff above him, it was a desperate measure, and he knew it, but he was a quick thinker, and while he was climbing the rope he had concluded that figuratively speaking it was best to take the bull by the horns.

When the head was thrust over the rocks above him, he knew that if it would but remain there until he could reach it he would at least capture one of the men then and there, and he thought with a grim smile that the other could not get very far away before he could hoist Pomp up to the top and so follow and capture the second, long before he could return to the counterfeiters' cave.

As might have been expected, the man whose hair was being thus roughly pulled, announced the progress of such a painful operation by numerous howls which echoed through the gorge with redoubled noise.

"Let go, curse you!" he cried, still thinking it was one of his amiable friends who was endeavoring to pull him over the cliff.

Joe vouchsafed no reply, but continued to pull with renewed vigor, and meanwhile the outlaw kept up his unseemly howls.

"Dan—Dan!!" cried the fellow to his companion who had remained on the top with him: "ketch hold of me, quick! He's pullin' me over the cliff! Let go, will you?"

But Joe refused to let go. On the contrary, he pulled harder than ever, while on the other hand, the man called Dan had replied to his pal's request, and had seized him by the heels, pulling in the opposite direction with all his strength.

The curses which rent the air from the poor fellow thus placed between two opposing forces, were something awful, but Joe did not propose to loose his hold until he had to.

That moment, however, arrived very soon, for he could not hold his own great weight for long with but one hand, and that one, his left, so watching his chance, he gave one last violent tug, getting the fellow's shoulders well over the edge, and then suddenly let go.

The effect was precisely what he had calculated upon.

The man behind, who had hold of the prostrate fellow's legs, was of course exert-

ing every muscle to get his friend back upon the ground above, and thus when the strain suddenly ceased, he staggered precipitately backward, dragging the other man with him, and both rolled in a confused heap upon the soft earth.

With one great effort, the Vermonter threw himself upward, and before the counterfeiters had regained their feet he was upon them.

Then began a fight which was the most severe of any in which Joe had ever participated.

The fellow whose hair had been so violently pulled was rolling over and over on the moss, moaning with pain, but the other, a fellow almost as big as Joe, was quickly upon his feet, and seeing the Vermonter's form outlined against the sky, he pulled his revolver and fired straight at it.

When the weapon was discharged, Joe was not more than four feet from its muzzle, and he felt a sharp sting upon his body which told him that he had been wounded.

But before the flash had subsided he had closed with the murderous outlaw, and in an instant more they were rolling over and over, tightly locked in each other's embrace.

The victim of circumstance who had been bewailing so loudly, immediately saw that a fight was going on, and rightly judged that it was with the one who had pulled his hair, and leaping to his feet with the fury of a tiger, he fell upon the struggling duet, tooth and nail.

In the darkness and excitement, together with the writhing and wriggling of their bodies, however, he had considerable difficulty in determining which was which, so that for the first moment his friend received quite as many of his blows as his enemy.

But such a condition of things could not last long. The fiercest combats are usually the soonest ended.

Joe had succeeded in getting the powerful fingers of his right hand around his assailant's throat, and unmindful of the blows being showered upon him by the other, he gripped tighter and tighter.

Nothing belonging to the animal kingdom could have withstood that terrible squeezing upon the air passages. They were as effectually closed as though they had been hermetically sealed, and in much less time than it takes to tell it, the victim of that awful choking was an unconscious mass of humanity.

As soon as the man ceased his struggles, Joe released him, and was about to turn upon the other, who had been pounding him so unmercifully, when there came the sound of a dull thud, and he, too, went under, knocked senseless by a blow from a club in the hands of Sam Sharp who had climbed the rope behind Joe, arriving just in time to be of real service.

The strain upon the two men had been something terrible. They had been forced to work fast and furiously, and now, when their work was done the effect came back upon them.

"I never was so near done up in my life," sighed Joe, "but Sam, ole feller, we've got 'em, just es sure 's ye're a livin' specimen o' mankind. Two on 'em 's gone under—there's one inside, seven daown thar with Chip, an' two up here with us; accordin' ter my geography thet air makes jist er dozen. I think we've gotter right ter feel proud, don't you?"

Sam did think so, and he was proud of the thing they had accomplished, but he did not for a moment forget that what might prove to be the hardest part of it was still to be done, namely, the capture of the counterfeiter chief, and the securing of sufficient evidence to convict them all in the cave.

"Say, Sam," said Joe, suddenly, when he had got his breath, "don't ye think thet we've gotter sorter white elephant ter take keer of naow, eh?"

"There is probably enough feed in their cave to supply them longer than there will be the need for it," replied Sam. "We must get them back into the chamber and see that they are all bound so securely that they cannot get away by any possibility; then, as an additional safeguard, we will leave Pomp to watch over them while we carry out the remainder of our programme."

Joe hauled the knotted rope, after calling down to Chip and finding that all was serene

below, and making the end fast to one of the counterfeiters last captured, lowered him over the side.

Chipmonk, having lighted the lantern, undid the rope, and presently the second one was lowered in the same manner, when Joe and Sam followed and soon were surveying the fruits of their conquest.

It was indeed a sorry-looking crowd that was laid out under the cliff, and when they saw the number of their enemies, and realized how easily they had been duped and drawn into the snare laid for them, dark scowls and expressions of bitter hatred and chagrin passed rapidly over their countenances.

"I guess we might 's well take aout ther gags naow," said Joe, "'s there ain't nobody araound w'ot'll be disturbed by their screechin' ef they want'er screech," and suiting the action to the word, he busied himself removing those very annoying impediments to the speech.

"Haow dew you feel naow?" he drawled to the chunky fellow who had given them so much trouble and whom he had hit under the ear with his bony fist. "Don't want'er tell, eh? Ruther mope, would ye? Wal, I don't know 's I blame ye any. Mebbe I'd mope myself if I was in your fix, an' besides, mebbe it's er good thing ter kinder git yer hand in, 'cos ye'll hev loads o' chance fur mopin' ther next few years."

Dark scowls and murderous glances met them, whichever way they turned their eyes, but it was upon Chipmonk upon whom most of the captive counterfeiters vented their rage.

He took it all very placidly, however, not once deigning a reply to their angry words, and at last they one and all resigned themselves to a moody silence.

Suddenly Joe, who had disappeared for a moment or two, returned hurriedly, and extreme consternation was visible in his voice, when he said:

"Say, Sam, thet air ladder's gone, an' it couldn't go alone either."

"Barnes has escaped!" exclaimed Sam.

"Perzactly," muttered Joe, "an' I've got ter take Pompan' overhaul him afore he reaches headquarters, ef possible," and he turned back into the cave.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DESERTED CAVE—CHIPMONK'S REQUEST.

WHEN Joe hurried back into the cave after having announced that the ladder inside was missing, he carried with him the one which had been used on the outside, for mounting from the ledge to the cliff above.

It was not long enough to reach the entire distance, but it was nearly so, and after lowering it down as far as he could reach, it only had a couple of feet to drop upon the lower floor.

He could easily have jumped down without danger, but the safest way was the best, and so a moment more found him stepping from the bottom rung upon the cavern's bottom.

The other ladder lay where Barnes had left it, when he went in the search of the hole through which he had fallen into the lower gallery, and for an instant Joe thought that perhaps his fears were groundless after all, and that the prisoner had not escaped, and so he hurried on into the cave toward the chamber.

When there, he quickly saw how the counterfeiter had effected his escape, and cocking his revolver, he began searching for the missing man.

He knew that he was either near by at that moment, or had found the means of egress into the lower cave, and might, even at that moment, be detailing the whole plot and circumstance to the man they were most anxious to capture, Captain Quickeye.

"One thing's sart'in," muttered Joe; "a half hour more 'r less won't make no difference now, an' we'll jest git them fellers in here, an' then I'll take Pomp an' see 'f I kin find aout w'ot's become of Barnesey."

The job of getting the nine captives down the ladder and back into the chamber, was in every sense a laborious one, and full of little incidents, both amusing and annoying, but it was finally accomplished to the entire satisfaction of both the detective and Joe, and the men were one and all fastened so securely that there could be no chance of their escaping.

"Poor feller," murmured Joe, when the job was finished, and he started with Pomp in search of Barnes. "If he gits away, he's gotter carry thet air collar an' bout er dozen links o' chain around with him till he kin fin' somebody ter take it off. Ef he's took ter the gallery Chip an' me did, I'll find him atween here an' the Black Hole unless—Thunder an' lightnin'! Pomp, air ye sure he went thet way, eh? I wouldn't wonder a darned bit ef he hain't a run right smack inter thet air beastly hole!"

They went on in silence—Joe and his faithful hound, and presently the animal paused upon the edge of the black abyss, and raising his nose high in the air, sent up a long mournful howl, which in the narrow confines of the cavern sounded thrice weird, making even Joe shudder as he heard it.

"Dead, eh?" he said, shivering a little; "well, ye needn't repeat thet information, 'cos 'tain't pleasant ter hear. Shet up, Pomp! Thet air note o' yourn's enough ter paralyze a slaughter-house. Dead, eh, Barnesey! Well, poor feller, I hope God'll forgive ye fur yer sins," and the brave Vermonter turned sadly away to rejoin his companions in the cave above.

The prisoners were bound hand and foot as when they were first taken. It was an uncomfortable position, but it would not do to run any risks, for if one got free, it would not take him long to liberate all the others, and then their hard work in capturing them would have been for naught.

Pomp was left with them as sentinel, and a good one he made, seeming to perfectly understand what was required of him; and the counterfeiters were told that if one of them made any effort to free himself, the dog would very soon convince him of the bad policy of such a move.

Then, when all was in readiness, our three friends left the cave together, pulling the ladders up after them as they went.

The sun was just rising when they reached the cliff above the ledge where the counterfeiting gang had been captured, and with Chipmonk leading the way, they started onward toward the bush entrance to the other cave.

It was for the purpose of capturing the chief that they were making the expedition, and each one felt in his heart that the job before them was a much more difficult and complicated one than that which had just been consummated, for they had now to cope with a man whose person had been surrounded by every possible means of protection; whose nerve and resource were capable of any lengths, and who knew no fear.

Sharp was known to say afterward that he never feared the prospect of an encounter so much as he did that one, for he knew with whom he had to deal; he knew the man in his proper person, so to speak; he had been by his side on a former occasion when the peril was very great, and he knew to what great lengths the counterfeiter chief's cool audacity and daring could go.

But nevertheless the brave young detective did not flinch. Floating through his brain was a vague longing for a certain peculiar termination to their expedition which he meant to bring about if possible.

As for Joe; he went along with the same careless mien which seemed always to sit upon him—which would have taken him into the murderous fire at Antietam with the same apparent coolness with which he took his chair at the dining-table.

But the boy, Chipmonk, seemed to be strangely subdued and silent.

His usual vivacity and impertinence were gone from him, and he only spoke when addressed, and then only in monosyllables.

By and by they reached the cave, and were soon making their way along the narrow gallery leading from the Bush entrance to the main gallery.

As they passed the little chamber where the first fight had taken place, Chipmonk darted in, reappearing in a moment more with a bundle in his arms.

"Wot ye got thar, Chip?" asked Joe, seeing the bundle in the boy's hands.

"Things."

"Wot kinder things?"

"Duds."

"Yourn?"

"Yes—mine!"

And then they went on again. Occasionally Sharp would address some question to the lad, but he only received the briefest of replies, and at last desisted.

How silent and deserted seemed the great cavern. Though really not more silent than when they had been there together before, still the knowledge that the men who had peopled it were lying bound and helpless a quarter of a mile away lent a sense of dreariness to the general effect not before felt.

They had no fear of being seen nor heard.

Chipmonk assured them that the captain would be sleeping, and that the negro never left his quarters in the chief's chambers except when he was not there, or when he was ordered to do so.

"Joe," said Sharp, as they walked along side by side, Chipmonk being behind them with the light; "I am going to ask a favor of you."

"Say it, Sam," said Joe, laconically.

"It is a big one, Joe," continued the young detective, "at least you will think it so."

"Well, what is it?"

"This: if our plans succeed far enough so that we can get the negro out of the way without warning Captain Quickeye, I want you to consent that I may enter his apartments alone—will you?"

Joe was silent.

"Come, old fellow, do me this favor," continued Sam, persuasively; "I have very good reasons for asking it."

Joe remained unresponsive for a moment, but at last he said:

"Well, Sam, somehow 'tain't in me ter deny ye the thing ef ye want it, an' ye're general o' this 'ere army, anyway, but I don't like it no more fur thet. However, it shell be 's you say."

"Thanks, old fellow, thanks!" exclaimed Sam warmly. "I will be in no great danger, for he knows me."

They went on in silence a little further, when Sam felt a hand upon his arm.

"Say, Sharpey," said Chipmonk, with something of his old brightness and yet with a suspicious tremor in his voice, "ye'll let me go in wid yer, won't ye, eh? 'cos ye know ye wouldn't hev got here ef it hadn't been fur me, don't ye, eh? I kin go wid yer, can't I, eh, Sharpey?"

"No, Chip, my boy, I had rather go alone at first; why do you ask to go with me?"

But the boy did not reply. He dropped back into his former place in the rear, and did not speak again.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE IRON BAR—IN QUICKEYE'S PRESENCE.

At length the strange trio arrived before the entrance to the little gallery leading to the door of the captain's room, and there they paused.

"Now, Chip," said Sam, "your work commences. I only hope that it will turn out as we hope, and that you will in some way be able to entice the negro away from his post. You have told me enough of the great door which is between us and Captain Quickeye for me to know that it is useless for us to endeavor to get through it in any but the usual way, and I know enough of the man who caused it to be erected to know that he would perish behind it far rather than open it to admit us to his presence. Go, my boy, and do the best you can."

Without reply, Chipmonk started away, and was soon speaking with the black, through the little wicket.

"Is the cap'n up?" asked Chip.

"He am. He am jes' froo wiv' him breakfas'. Yo' kin come right in, Mars'r Chip, fo' he done git orders dat yo' was not ter wait," and the great door was thrown open to admit the boy.

He trembled a little as he went through the massive portal, wondering, no doubt, if he would ever get out alive, but beyond a little word of thanks to the negro, he said nothing, and was soon standing before the chief—or rather in the corner which he always sought, where there was less light than in any other part of the chamber.

"Ah, Chip," said Quickeye, as the lad entered, "you are rather late; I expected you two hours ago, and was just on the point of sending the black to find out what was matter. You succeeded all right, I suppose?"

"Um!" replied Chipmonk, with a violent nod.

The nondescript monosyllable was his favorite way of expressing an affirmative, and the captain was as familiar with it as the men were.

"Where are the prisoners?" continued Quickeye.

"In the cave."

"Ah! In the big chamber, I suppose. Did you have any trouble in capturing them?"

"Sum. Part o' ther men ain't got no sand."

The counterfeiter chief laughed.

"Well, you probably made up the deficiency, for you seem to have a reserve quantity of that article always on hand. Was anybody hurt?"

"Um!"

"Who?"

"Joe pulled Sikes's hair 'most all out, an' ther little chunky feller got a swipe in the jaw thet 'most paralyzed him."

Again the captain laughed.

"I hope that Joe was not hurt," he said, remembering his promise to Chip.

"Not er bit," nodded the boy.

"Very well, Chip; you have done nobly, and I will reward you for it when the proper time comes. That will do now. I will be out and interview the prisoners during the forenoon."

"Right ye be!" muttered the boy, as he started away, and in an instant more he was in the outer chamber with the negro.

"Say, Cuffy," he said, pausing just outside of the great door, "ther boss wanted me ter tell ye thet ye c'u'd go and see ther prisoners ef ye wanted ter."

"Wha' fo', Mars'r Chip?"

"Fur example, mebbby. One of 'em 's most 's black 's ye are, an' he thought mebbby ye'd know him."

"He said dat dis chile c'u'd go out, Mars'r Chip?"

"Um! fur half an hour."

"Sho! p'raps dat I'd better ax, fu'st."

"Ef ye do, ye won't be 'lowed out, 'cos he's awful busy."

The darky looked about him for a moment or two, undecided what to do, but the temptation was very great. He had not been out in several days, for Quickeye had never remained in his cavern quarters so long at one time before.

"Well, air ye comin'?" asked Chip.

"Yo's dead sho' dat he said I c'u'd?"

"Course I be."

"Den I's a-comin'!"

Chipmonk felt triumphant. Every plan was working beautifully.

He started down the narrow passage toward the main gallery with the gigantic negro following closely behind him, taking good care to keep up a running conversation the while, in order that his friends might know that the black was with him.

What they would do he did not know, and cared less, for his whole mind was upon what was to follow the darky's capture: upon the encounter yet to come with the counterfeit captain as an opponent.

They reached the point where the narrow passage opened into the larger corridor, and the negro had no sooner passed it than with a spring like a panther Joe lit upon his shoulders, while Sam grasped him by the legs.

But neither of the two men were prepared for the exhibition of wonderful muscular power which followed.

The gigantic black seemed as though made of tempered steel, for with a roar of rage he hurled the detective nearly across the gallery with his foot and then tried to shake off Joe.

But although he writhed and twisted and clawed with his great ebony hands, Joe clung tightly to his hold, for he plainly saw that the only way to capture the fellow was to hang on until Sam could return to the fray.

Sam, however, had had enough of grappling with such a being, and when he approached again he held in his hand a heavy piece of iron which he had picked up as they came through the corridor.

The negro and Joe were still struggling, Joe clinging to his back and positively refusing to be shaken off.

Sam approached them with the bar uplifted, and although the black tried to seize him

in his long arms, he dodged, and watching his chance, finally succeeded in bringing down the iron bar upon the giant's head with force enough to fell an ox.

The fellow quivered for an instant, and then went down with a crash, and Sam lost no time in using his two pairs of handcuffs to good advantage, using one of them upon the negro's wrists and the other upon his ankles.

Then they pulled him over to one side and left him.

"If I had ter ride many sich hosses es thet," muttered Joe, "I'd git my life insured right away, you bet!"

"Now," said Sam, "the tug of war—diplomatic war—begins. Did this fellow lock the door after him, Chip?"

"It's er spring lock," replied the boy, "an' ther key's in his pocket."

Sam quickly secured that useful article, and prepared to enter the counterfeiter chief's apartments.

"Remember your promise, Joe," he said, as the Vermonter started to accompany him; "I am to enter alone."

"All right, Sam," replied Joe, "but I'm a-goin' 's far 's ther door, an' don't ye forgit it! Ye may want some help, an' ef ye do, I want er sorter close to ye."

"Show us the way, Chip," continued the detective, as he wrung Joe's hand in silent thanks, and the boy, without replying, led the way back into the narrow passage.

They reached the door and Sam quickly unlocked it, throwing it wider open than the negro had ever allowed it to be.

Then, pausing upon the threshold he turned and said:

"Remember, Joe, all that I have said to you, in case anything happens to me. Remember our conversation in the other cave," and he reached out his hand, which Joe wrung with a force that made Sam wince.

"And you, my boy," he continued, "will go with Joe when he carries the message, if it should be necessary. Remember, that to grow up into a good man, one must be a good boy, and I believe you are such."

Then he turned, and went rapidly toward the curtains.

Chipmonk started after him, but Joe grasped the boy by the arm, holding him back, and said:

"No, ye don't, Chip! Sam wanted ter go alone, an' ye must let him!"

But the boy turned, and his great black eyes looked up at the man appealingly, as he cried with a wild sob, and in a voice which was entirely new to the Vermonter:

"Oh, Joe, Joe! for the love of Heaven release me! Let me go in there, too! Please, Joe, please! It is more to me than anything in the world!"

Joe was so astounded that, without meaning to, he loosened his hold enough so that the boy, with a little quick jerk, pulled himself free, and darted away toward the curtains, just as Sam parted them, and stepped through into the presence of Captain Quick-eye.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"I PITY YOU! I FORGIVE YOU!"

As Samuel Sharp stepped into the "sanctum" of Captain Quick-eye, the latter individual was bending over his desk, busy with pen and paper, and did not notice the detective's approach until he had crossed the apartment and paused within a few feet of him.

Then the counterfeiter chief raised his eyes, and for once, certainly, they contained an expression of unbounded surprise.

"How in the world did you get here?" asked Quick-eye amazedly, and rising with a sudden impulse he extended his hand as he added: "But, take a chair, for no matter how you got here, I am glad to see you."

"Wait," said Sharp, "before you give me your hand, for I have something to tell you. Did you receive the letter I left for you?"

"Certainly, Burke, certainly."

"Well, I have a confession to make, and a boon to ask."

"Confess and ask, my dear fellow, and I will both forgive and give if it is in my power. Somehow, Burke, your honest eyes make a man of me again—but for one thing—but for one great crime."

"Captain," said Sam slowly, "my name

is not Burke, nor do you know me in my true character."

"What matters it?" sighed the captain; "we are all of us more or less counterfeits and impostors; no man is always his true self, and our names are like the frames of pictures, but decorations to set off the bits of detail. I know your face, and that is enough, for an honest face is a novelty to me now. Yours is honest, Burke."

"I hope so, indeed. But, captain, I am more of an impostor and a counterfeit than you suppose, for I am *not* the person who fled after killing a man in Houston street. That man was arrested and is now under indictment, awaiting trial."

The captain pushed the hair back from his brow somewhat impatiently, and said rather sharply:

"Well—why these details?"

"It is a part of my confession."

"Ah, yes; go on."

"I am a detective, and personated that criminal in order to reach you."

"What?" cried Quick-eye, taking a step backward and evidently utterly incredulous of the other's statement.

"See," continued Sharp, and he took his two revolvers from his pockets and laid them upon the table, "before I proceed with my confession, I wish to place myself utterly at your mercy. I am now entirely unarmed."

Captain Quick-eye was so astonished that he made no reply whatever, and both were so engaged that neither noticed the little figure of Chipmonk, as he stepped behind the curtains which hid the bed at the further end of the room, carrying in his hand the bundle which he had brought from the chamber near the Bush Entrance.

Sharp continued:

"I have said that I am a detective, and I am at present known as Sam Sharp."

"Sam Sharp—and not a prisoner? How is that? Did Chip lie to me?"

"No—but he deceived you. Will you listen while I tell you how? You see I am unarmed."

"Proceed," said Quick-eye hoarsely.

"But first, tell me your true name."

"My name is Harry Gordon, and you once knew me as 'Mosquito!'"

"*Harry Gordon! Mosquito! YOU!!*" and the counterfeiter staggered back, drawing his revolver as he did so.

But, Sharp never moved. He remained silently and sorrowfully gazing at the man before him.

"I know you now," muttered the captain.

"I have heard of you many times as Harry Gordon, and ay, I knew you as Mosquito. Well—and why are you here? Why have you disarmed yourself and then made this declaration, knowing that I will kill you?" and he raised his revolver, pointing it directly at Sam's heart.

"One moment before you fire," said Sam coolly, raising his hand. "I have expected that you would kill me, but first let me finish my confession."

"Though you deserve no mercy, I will wait," replied Quick-eye coldly, "for you cannot escape me."

"I will not try to," returned Sam. "I was sent to apprehend you and personated the Houston street murderer in order to reach you. I succeeded, as you know, and we escaped together from the 'Nest' that night, when I took risks equal to your own. But, captain, you said words to me that night in the boat which made me hesitate to pursue you further; you advised me against the course you thought I was seeking to adopt; you implored me in words which I will never forget to fly from crime as I would from a pestilence, and cited your own experience as an additional argument for my welfare. I could not forget it, and for days I remained in doubt as to my proper course."

"But, my duty was to fulfil my promise, and I had promised to break up your gang. Then I wrote you the letter which you say you received, and decided to pursue the search in a legitimate way. I swear to you that I have not used a particle of information received from you, in reaching here, but that I have ferreted out your hiding-place entirely from information received elsewhere."

"Go on—go on," urged Quick-eye hoarsely.

"If there is more, tell it quickly."

"There is more, captain. The party

which Chipmonk brought out to capture me, with Joe Alden, are every one prisoners; your negro servant is a prisoner, and you alone, of all your force, are at liberty."

If the counterfeiter chief had been astounded before, he was utterly nonplussed by the last statement. He stepped quickly to the table and seized the two weapons Sam had placed there, and then dropped once more into his chair by the desk.

"Go on," was all that he said, but Sam could see that the captain was prepared to kill him if he made a move from the position he occupied.

"You alone are at liberty," continued Sam, "and I have purposely placed myself at your mercy. I am unarmed; you have my weapons in your hands, but I hope you will not use them."

"I certainly shall, when you have done: one for you and the other for—myself."

"Captain," said Sharp, "I do not know your true name, nor do I wish to, but I believe, when you bore it, that it was an honest one. I am here to plead with you as you pleaded with me. I am here to beg of you in the name of the God to whom we all owe our existence, to resume that honest name; to ask you to go forth and make it felt in the walks of men; to plead with you in the name of manhood—of integrity—of honor—ay, in the name of the mother who bore you and whose memory I believe you cherish, to forsake everything connected with this life and become what I know you most desire to be, a man who is respected, and who respects himself."

As Sam spoke, Captain Quick-eye forgot his revolvers. They slowly drooped until he left them lying untouched upon the desk before him, and his face assumed an ashen pallor, like the lividness of death.

With a sudden exclamation he arose to his feet and began pacing back and forth before Sam, who still remained motionless and calm.

"Burke—Burke!" exclaimed Quick-eye, suddenly pausing, "you do not know what a temptation you hold out to me. Oh, God! if I could get forgiveness for the one great crime of my life, before which all others sink to nothingness, I would try to do as you advise. But I cannot—I cannot! you do not know—cannot imagine what it is to live as I have lived, with a specter ever before me, behind me, at my side—sleeping or waking! Not the figure of a Nemesis, hunting me down from a thirst for vengeance—no! I would laugh at such! but worse, Burke, far worse! Great, pleading, sorrowful eyes which I closed forever look out at me from every corner, and a soft, tender voice is ever whispering in my ears, 'I pity you! I forgive you!' Anything but that! anything but forgiveness, and I have sought crime—as the drunkard seeks opiates when liquor will no longer avail. She would not curse me, and I have sought to curse myself. Only for that, Burke—only for that!"

"Tell me of it," was all that Sharp replied, and for an instant the counterfeiter stared wonderingly at him.

"Tell you?" he murmured presently; "well, why not? A few words will suffice. I was a young man well liked and respected, and I married—an angel, in human form. We had one child—a boy. I took to gambling fiercely, and of course, drinking with it, and one night I went home mad over my losses. My wife upbraided me, and I struck her. Struck her, man; do you understand what a brute I was? Struck her, my wife! and she fell at my feet!" and great beads of perspiration stood out on his brow as he continued huskily:

"I tried, oh, how I tried, all night long to bring her to, and at last she opened her eyes and looked at me, and then, as I tried to beg her forgiveness, great streams of blood spouted from her mouth, and I knew she was dying. She managed to say, 'I pity you! I forgive you!' and then she became unconscious again, and I held her there in my arms until she ceased to breathe."

"She was dead, and I had killed her! I covered her face with kisses; I begged her to come to life again; I acted as all madmen do when they see the results of their folly. Then I took our child and fled. I left the baby with an old woman who had washed for us, to care for, and then—well, you know the rest except that, once, when I went after

the boy, I found that the woman had gone—no one knew where. Burke, Burke, can I live a new life in the face of such a sin? Would a lifetime of atonement efface the memory of Vera's love and forgiveness?"

"Yes, even that!" replied Sam, and tears stood in his eyes as he spoke. "She forgave you! Vera pitied and forgave you, and if she were here now, she would still say, 'I pity you. I forgive you!'"

"No—no—no! Not with all my other sins to answer for!"

The curtains near the bed parted; the figure of a beautiful woman issued from between them, and cried:

"I am here! I do pity and forgive you!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

BACK FROM THE GRAVE.

HAD a bombshell exploded in their midst; had the earth fallen in upon them and buried them forever beneath the old mountain, it could have produced no greater effect than did that sudden apparition from the bed curtains, and the sound of that tender voice as it uttered the words, "I am here! I do pity and forgive you!"

To the bowed and shaken man through whose soul the tempest of remorse was raging with cyclonic fury, it was as if the heavens had opened and sent down the darkest stain of his life, that he might obliterate it forever. He was a man who could withstand the ravages of danger, and breast the waves of adversity with a cold, imperturbable smile, but at that moment, when his heart was swelling with misery, the sudden evolution from the dark corner unnerved him entirely, and he turned and gazed at Vera's figure for a moment with staring eyes and spasmodic breath.

Then, as if the whole realization had burst upon him; then, when he saw that it was indeed Vera before him, he swayed forward a little, groping as if in the dark, and without a word or sound fell headlong to the floor, senseless.

It must indeed be a powerful emotion which can overcome a man like him, but before that vision so suddenly appearing, every sensation seemed strained and broken—every nerve paralyzed and dead.

Sam Sharp was as greatly surprised as was the captain, for he had no idea from whence the figure had sprung.

But she—Vera—when she saw the man go down before her in that deathlike swoon, all her fortitude, all her courage forsook her, and she went upon her knees by his side, crying:

"I have killed him—I have killed him!"

But no. A glass of water upon the table, which Sam hurriedly brought forward, revived him a little, and finally he opened his eyes and looked up into the beautiful face bending over him.

"Vera—Vera!" he murmured, "am I dreaming? Is it my Vera? Have you come back from the grave? Speak, speak!"

"Yes, yes; it is I. Open your eyes again and look at me. Listen! I was behind the curtain, and heard all that you said to Mr. Sharp, all that he said to you."

Slowly the fallen man recovered his strength, and presently they helped him to a chair, while his wife dropped upon her knees at his side.

"Tell me," he said, faintly, "tell me how it all happened—how you were there. I do not understand it."

And then in a low voice she told him her story. Told him how she had, after a long illness, recovered from the internal injury which his blow had caused, and how she had so vainly searched for her husband and child with never a clue to either. Then she had heard of the counterfeiters in Virginia, and had become imbued with the idea that he was connected with them, and so, when the gang was broken up, she had searched and searched for his face among the prisoners, and among those who had escaped prison in death. Then she gave up, until one day she saw in the papers mention of another counterfeiting gang that had grown out of the old one, and she had gone to the inspector for permission and the means to search it out.

"I came to Londonderry," she said, "on the same train with you, and talked with you at the station in Chester. Don't you remember Miss Jenkins?"

He nodded, and a faint smile stole over his face.

"In Londonderry," she went on, "I found a boy known as Chipmonk—a ragged, dirty boy, but one who was bright and quick, and I at first engaged him to pilot me around the woods and mountains."

"In his face I saw a strange resemblance to somebody I had seen before—"

"Ay—I saw that too," interrupted the captain.

"And I talked to him until he told me his story. All he knew was that he was born somewhere in the South, and that he had called a woman by the name of Noonan, mother."

"Noonan!" cried Quickeye, starting up, "why, that is the name of the woman with whom I left the baby!"

"Yes, I know," continued Vera, "and Chipmonk is indeed our own son. I will not tell you now, how long I was in coming to that conclusion, only that I proved it by two indisputable proofs. A locket which he wore about his neck and which Mrs. Noonan had told him never to part with, as it was a charm which would one day bring him good fortune, and a scar upon his wrist when he was a very small baby."

"Then I told him that I was his mother, and I wept over him and kissed him, and one day he told me a great deal of his history which I had not heard before—about his connection with you; about your two homes—the farm and this cave, and that he was a frequent visitor at both places."

"Then I knew that my business was nearly finished, and I persuaded him to bring me here to this cave."

"I used to put on his ragged garments and come inside among the men, for our boy and I are very nearly the same height and look very much alike. I studied his queer talk and strange ways, and we used to come together to the Bush Entrance, and first he would go into the cave for awhile among the men, and then he would return to me in the little chamber near the entrance, and I would take his clothes and go in for a while. Then, after nightfall we would go away together and return to the village."

"There, also, I personated him at intervals, making acquaintances, and many are the strange questions I have been asked there regarding Miss Jenkins."

"I had to cut my hair off, but when short, it curled just as his did. We used to sit at the window together, and whenever a person went by he would tell me who it was, where he lived, and the name by which he was commonly called. Whenever we were out together, our boy would speak familiarly with those whom we met, and thus I learned a great deal."

"In short, I left no stone unturned to become perfect in my character, for it was to take me where I could study you, and where some day I meant to reveal myself to you, and implore you to abandon this life entirely for my sake."

"At last I felt myself to be proficient, and I took our boy away to Springfield, where I placed him in kind and gentle hands, and then I returned here to go on with my work."

"I felt confident that I would not be discovered, and I was right."

"Almost as soon as I had returned, Mr. Sharp came, and I saw him with Joe. I instinctively felt that he was a detective, and I resolved to keep near him, in the hope that I could prevent his taking you to prison."

"I little knew what a noble man he was, and is, for he has said to you what I would say; and more than that—thinking that I was a friendless, homeless boy, he offered me a home and an education, as he would have offered them to our boy had he been in my place."

"God bless you, Mr. Sharp!"

"You know the rest. You know how you sent me out to capture him and Joe, and I will tell you some other time how they captured your men instead."

"Once I thought I could frighten the detective, intending to tell him my story, and force him to promise that you could go free, but we were interrupted by three of the men, and then Joe and his dog came and turned the tables."

"Now, my husband, I have told my story."

I freely forgive you all I have to forgive. Mr. Sharp has himself proposed that you resume your true name, and begin life anew somewhere, far distant from these scenes. Will you do it? It will make me so happy! so happy! and I have suffered so much."

But Quickeye shook his head.

"Think!" cried Vera. "We will take our boy with us, and we will devote our lives to him," and she clasped her hands piteously together.

"Vera," said the captain, huskily, "you offer me a paradise; but think, think what it would cost Burke—that is, Mr. Gordon, if I should accept. You call him noble; shall I be less so, now that I found my manhood? He was sent here to arrest me, and it is his duty to do so, to hand me over to the law—to justice. Shall I dishonor him, who has been so honorable with me?"

"You mistake, sir," interrupted Sam. "Every man has two duties to fulfill in this world: his duty to man and his duty to his God, and whenever they are opposed, the latter is by far the greater. I admit that my duty to man would be to surrender you to justice, but I feel that I am doing a greater and a nobler act in starting you out anew, a free man, to atone for your wrongs, in the good you can do to others in the future."

"No, no," murmured Quickeye, "I will serve my sentence out first, and then—"

"Then," said Sam, "you will have to give yourself up, for I will have nothing to do with it. The Government can have no satisfaction in confining you in prison, and surely your wife and child are better and stronger incentives to doing right than white walls and prison fare and associations. Be a whole man, and say that you will do as we ask."

There was a long silence, like the stillness of death, and then the captain looked up, and putting both his hands in Sharp's said:

"I will!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN UNPLEASANT COMPLICATION.

THAT they were happy who were gathered there in the counterfeiters' cave, hidden away in the very heart of Glebe Mountain, cannot for a moment be doubted.

Vera, whom we first knew as Vera Preston, and who subsequently carried out her purpose disguised as Chipmonk, the waif and stray of Londonderry, forgot all her wrongs, all her years of suffering and anguish in that supreme moment of reconciliation with her wayward husband, to whom her heart had ever been constant, even though she knew him to be an outcast and a fugitive from justice.

Within the charmed circle of his embrace, old troubles but lent an added luster to the present joy. It was like the beautiful spring-time, bursting out of the womb of relentless winter.

As for Quickeye—well, to analyze his feelings would indeed be a difficult task.

The one great crime, before which all subsequent ones had been to him, as nothing, was swept forever from his conscience, and that one great, black, threatening blot upon his career, had been washed out forever from his sins.

The intense joy which he felt in consequence, was such as to render him almost forgetful of his other great sins for the moment, for what were governments what were men, and women, and laws, and long-upheld customs and usages to him as contradistinguished from his wife?

He had passed through the valley and the shadow of moral death; he had stood face to face, ay, held by the hand, that great destroyer called crime; he had walked through the by-ways of sin and shame, and dwelt in the house of deceit, hatred and revenge.

But ever, by his shoulder—whispering in his ear—calling him back from the wrongs he would commit, and upbraiding him for those committed, stood the censor conscience, throughout his wild and lawless career.

Wherever he went, in whatever phase of life he bathed himself, he was as two distinct personages—one being the embodiment of good impulses and noble deeds, and the other urging him on to the committal of evil and the consummation of wrong-doing.

A being made of paradoxes—an enigma unto himself.

When Harry Gordon, in the character of Burke, had sought him out in the fore part

of our story, and had desired to become one with him in his battle against law and order, the captain's nobler nature spoke out, in spite of his apparent character, and drew such a picture of the life he led, as would have caused any youthful aspirant for dishonor to halt and ponder.

Those words, spoken in the open boat, when they were flying together from the officers of the law, had forever won the admiration of the young man who had been taught honor and manhood by such a one as Ralph Gordon, in the old days in Virginia.

Thus it was when, as Sam Sharp, he bearded the bold captain in his den, and captured his entire gang, he had determined to show him that great mercy which only a noble heart such as his would have recognized.

Thus it was that he had pleaded with Vera, and had finally drawn from the captain that hearty:

"I will!"

For several moments, none of them spoke a word.

It seemed unnecessary.

The silence was full of thoughts for each; full of congratulations, full of fears, doubts, hopes for the future which those three words had opened up for at least two of them.

At last the voice of the ex-counterfeiter chief broke the silence.

"Vera," he said, and his voice was full of nameless emotions, "Vera, henceforth you shall lead—I will follow. Where shall we go to begin that new life in which we will find so much happiness?—that new life which will be for me a life of atonement for the past, so far as it is in my power to make it so."

She turned upon him her glorious eyes, from which that latent sadness had now fled forever, for they were filled with unspeakable joy and rest.

"Wherever we decide to go," she said, "we will be supremely happy always."

She was about to say more, but at that instant a most unlooked-for interruption occurred.

The report of a firearm rung out through the cavern, startling them all out of their momentary forgetfulness.

"What is that?" cried Quickeye.

"It must be Joe," returned Gordon (we will call him by that name now, since it is his right one), "and he would not fire without good cause."

Motioning them all to keep back, he sprung toward the door, and passed out through the ante-room, only to be met at the great outer door, leading into the main cavern, by Joe himself, who sprung through it, hastily closing and barring it after him with all the speed he could muster.

"What is the matter?" cried Gordon, seizing Joe by the arm, as soon as he had completed his task of fastening the door.

"Matter!" cried Joe; "matter 'nuff, I should say. Suthin' 'r rather hev gone an' let ther hull b'ilin' of them scoundrels w'ot we had so nicely coopered, outen ther cave, an' they're swarmin' outside like a passel o' bees—thet's w'ots ther matter, Sam Sharp!"

"Matter enough, I should say!" replied Gordon, an uneasy sensation stealing over him.

"One thing is certain, however," he continued, after a moment's pause, "they can't get through that door unless they have got a cannon, and I don't believe they have, so we will have plenty of time to think over what is best for us to do."

"Plenty o' time!" returned Joe. "Well, I should smile! Plenty of time? Say, Sam, we *will* hev plenty o' time, sure's you're born, an' unless ther's ernurther way outen here, we'll be a-eatin' on each other afore long."

Gordon started violently.

"Starvation!" he cried. "We can stand it, Joe, you and I and the captain; but she—"

"Eh?" interrupted Joe.

"She—Vera—it is of her that I am—"

"Say, Sam, be you gone mad, 'r air ye foolin', eh?"

A flood of light burst upon Gordon.

For the moment he had forgotten that Joe was unacquainted with the secret of Vera's disguise as the boy Chipmonk.

He proceeded at once to explain with all haste, and as he talked, Joe's mouth opened wider and wider, until it seemed as though his jaw would part in the sockets.

For a full minute after Gordon had finished his own recital, which embraced everything that had occurred, Joe was silent, but at last he turned and strode toward the barred doorway.

"I'm a-goin'!" he said.

"Going where?" asked Gordon.

"Outen this 'ere—eh? oh! I forgot! Can't, kin I? Say, Sam—I'm a-goin' ter call ye Sam 'cos thet's ther name I'm uster—ye'll hev ter interdooce me, I s'pose."

"Certainly."

"An' Chip's a woman, eh?"

"She is."

"W-h-e-w-e-w!" he whistled, "an' ter think o' some o' ther cuss-words I've used afore him—her! Well, fire away, Sam—it's gotter be did."

"Come," replied Gordon, and he led the way into the captain's sanctum.

Joe stepped inside rather awkwardly, much as though he would rather have remained outside, which was indeed the case.

But the instant that Vera saw him she left Quickeye's side and ran joyfully toward him, nor did she pause until she had thrown her arms around his neck and imprinted a kiss upon either brown cheek.

"Good, honest, reliable, sturdy Joe!" she cried—"what do I not owe you, my brave companion and friend."

"Well, I'm blowed!" was all Joe could say as he stood with his long arms hanging loosely at his sides, for once in his life, speechless. "I'm much obliged t' ye, I'm sure, miss, but—whar the devil's Chip, Sam?"

"I am Chip, Joel! Has not Mr. Gordon told you?"

"Mister who? oh, yes, I forgot ag'in. Ye see ye're changin' names in here so durned fast that a feller like me can't keep track of 'em all. F'rinstance, this feller's Sam fur all time ter come 's fur 's I'm consarned, an' you—well, you ain't Chip no longer, no-how!"

"Yes, Joe, let me still continue to be Chipmonk to you."

Joe was silent for a moment, but presently he raised his head, and gazed for an instant steadily at Vera's beautiful features.

All traces of confusion had fled from his honest physiognomy as he drawled out slowly, these words:

"Wal, I think 'twould be better so fur the present, but 'norder ter be Chip, ye've gotter put on Chip's togs ag'in! I wouldn't ax ye ter do thet air if I didn't think it fur the best, but I do."

"Ye see, Chip, them tarnal varmints w'ot we coopered in ther other cave, hev got aout somehaow 'ruther, an' ther hull bilin' on 'em 's outside now, a-lookin' fur gore, 's much 's enny red bull ye ever saw, an' ef they *should* happen ter git ther drop onto us, it 'ud be lots better thet they sh'ud capture ther boy Chipmonk than a beautiful woman like yeouw."

"I don't know 's I make myself quite plain, ma'am—that is, Chip, but ef ye'll jes' go an' think 'tover a minit, mebbe ye'll see it yerself."

"Naow, Sam," he continued, turning to Gordon, "interdooce me ter t'other one, an' ef ye've got enny love left fur me, don't tell me more'n one name ter call him by."

"All right," replied Gordon, "it shall be as you say. Come with me."

They walked together across the room to where Quickeye was sitting, while Vera turned and glided once more behind the curtains.

"Joe," said Gordon, when they had reached Quickeye, "this is the captain; captain, let me make you acquainted with one of nature's noblemen, my friend Joseph Alden."

"Cap, haow air ye?" said Joe, sticking out his hard, firm hand, which the captain seized in his warm clasp.

"Pretty well, Joe, thank you," he replied, smiling. "how are you?"

"Purty much ther same, only bothered—tarnation bothered. Ye see, them devils outside hev got us inter a bad fix, an'—"

"Hullo yerself, Joe," exclaimed a voice behind him at that instant, and wheeling quickly, the astonished Vermonter beheld the boy Chipmonk looking up at him with saucy face and flashing eyes.

"Chip, by thunder!" he cried, seizing

Vera, and raising her in the air over his head.

"Thet is," he continued, putting her down suddenly, "I know ye ain't Chip, an' yet I know ye air—an' say, Cap"—wheeling suddenly again—"I ain't bothered no more!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SHALL HE DIE OF THIRST?

"CAPTAIN," said Gordon, "is there any way out of this room except by the way we came in?"

Quickeye shook his head.

"None," he replied.

"Then there is nothing for us to do but to fight our way through?"

"Nothing—unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless they would still recognize my authority and so allow you to pass out with Vera."

"Do you think they would?"

"They might."

"Not much!" interrupted Joe. "They know well 'nuff that Chip's ag'in 'em; they know I be, an' they know Sam is, too. W'ot's more, I stretched one of 'em on ther cold, cold yarth when ye heerd me fire, an' they won't forgit it enny more than they will t'other delicate attentions which they hev received at our hands."

"But if I should go out among them—" interposed the captain.

"They'd kill ye on sight, Cap, sure! 'Tain't no use in talkin'—it can't be did!"

"Can't we fight our way out?" asked Gordon.

"Thet's more sensible, but jest 'bout's bad 's t'other suggestion," replied Joe.

"Why so?"

'Cos they've got thet air little hallway 'r cave, 'r anything ye've a mind ter call it, w'ot leads from ther main corridor ter this 'ere place, kivered with their guns, an' ef one on us should stick a head out fur 'nuff ter see where ter shoot, thet'd be a hole through it quicker 'n scat!"

"Well, what then?" asked Quickeye, for all of them seemed to look up to Joe now as the common leader through the new peril.

"Don' know," was Joe's rather unsatisfactory reply. "I'll hev ter think."

At that moment there came a loud pounding upon the door leading into the corridor.

"Let them pound!" said Quickeye, "they can't break it down, and what is more, it will take them some time to starve us out."

"How so?" asked Gordon.

"Because the food supply is stored in a room leading off from the ante-room, where they can't get at it, and we can."

"But water!" cried Gordon. "We must have water!"

"Look there!" replied Quickeye, pointing to one corner of the room.

They looked, and beheld a stream of water flowing from a half-inch lead pipe into a bowl, and escaping again from that, through its bottom.

"That never changes, winter or summer," continued the captain, "and it comes from a spring so situated that they cannot cut us off from it."

"So far as food and water are concerned, we can live here for months, for the store-room is well stocked, and there are but four of us to feed."

"Bully!" cried Joe; "we ain't got ter do enny crawlin' yet, hev we, an' I've got plenty o' time ter think."

"Yes, I think you have, without doubt."

The loud knocking continued at intervals on the door, and Gordon expressed the opinion that those outside desired a talk with them, so he and Joe went toward it.

"Stand to one side, so that they cannot shoot you," said Gordon, "while I open the little wicket."

Joe complied, and Gordon, taking a long stick in his hand, placed himself so that he could not be seen from the outside, and then pushed open the wicket.

"What do you want?" he asked, as soon as it was open.

"We wants ter know who's in there?" demanded the rough voice of one of the counterfeiters.

"What for?"

"Eh?"

"What do you want to know that for?"

"So's we kin calkerlate about how long ye kin live 'thout water."

"Oh!"

"We know ye've got grub enough, but grub ain't much good 'thout water."

"Ah!"

"How many air ye?"

"A dozen or so, more or less."

"Haw, haw, haw! Thet's good, thet is; but it don't wash, my covey."

"Why not?"

"'Cos 't don't! We've put ye down es three."

"What three?"

"W'y, thar's Chip, cuss 'im! an' ther Yankee—cuss him, tool and yerself, ther detective. Say!"

"What?"

"We ain't got nothin' ag'in you!"

"Thanks!"

"We ain't, honest. You're only attendin' ter biz, an' thet's square, but we wants ther Yankee, an' we wants Chip."

"What will you do with them if you get them?" asked Gordon.

"Make mince-meat of 'em, thet's w'ot!"

"Oh!"

"Fur sure! an' 'f you'll jest open up an' let us in, we'll promise thet *you* kin go scot free on condition thet ye'll never kim or send arter us ag'in!"

"Ah!"

"Exactly. Say!"

"What?"

"Thar's another thing we want."

"What is that?"

"Ther Cap's corpus."

"Eh?"

"Ther body o' ther Cap, fur we know thet he'd never give up, an' so ye've killed him."

"You think he is dead, then?"

"Dead's a herrin'."

"But suppose that he is not?"

"Eh?"

"Suppose that he is alive, and at present well?"

"Ye don't mean it!"

"I do, though. Suppose further, that he's bound hand and foot, and totally at our mercy?"

"What d'ye want us ter s'posen thet fur, eh?"

"Suppose still further, that what little water we have got, we are going to drink for ourselves?"

"W'ot 'r ye tryin' ter git at, anyhow?"

"And suppose that the captain is by this time beginning to feel thirsty?"

"Oh!"

"And that we won't give him a drink?"

"Them's hard lines."

"Well, rather."

"Go on, Mister Detective, an' tell us w'ot ye're drivin' at!"

"Suppose that we say, if you will allow us all to go scot free, as you call it, we'll let you have your captain back again?"

"Yes—go on."

"And that if you don't let us all go scot free, we'll let him die of hunger and thirst, what then?"

"I don't know. Say!"

"What?"

"Jest wait a minit till I talk ter ther fellers, an' I'll tell ye."

"All right—go ahead!"

There were several minutes of silence, during which Gordon allowed the wicket to close again, at the same time motioning Joe to keep quiet.

Presently there came a sharp rap on the door, and the wicket was again pushed open.

"Say!" came the voice.

"What?" replied Gordon.

"Let us hev Chip, 'cos he's a traitor, an' you an' ther Yankee can go free ef ye'll give up the Cap."

"No, that won't do."

"Well, we can't agree, then."

"All right!" replied Gordon, "In that case we'll take it out of the captain," and he again let the wicket drop.

But he did not immediately leave his post by the door, for he expected that those without would find that they had something more to say.

He was not mistaken, for presently there came another sharp rap.

Gordon opened the wicket.

"Say!" said the voice.

"Drive on," replied Gordon.

"Ef he dies, ye'll all die, won't ye?"

"Perhaps."

"Well, ye will, so ye'd better give up Chip."

"Not much!"

"Ye say thet ther Cap's alive?"

"I do."

"An' well?"

"He is."

"Well, fetch him to ther wicket, whar we kin talk ter him, an' we'll see w'ot he says about it."

"All right—wait!"

"You bet we'll wait! That's w'ot we're a-doin'."

Gordon allowed the wicket to drop into place, and then taking Joe by the arm, went into the inner room.

He told the captain all that had taken place in their conversation, adding that his plot was, if they should accept the terms, for the captain to accede to the plan, and take upon himself the responsibility of seeing them safely out of the cave.

Then, in a few days—as soon as it was practicable, he—the captain—should join them, and they would leave together.

"This," he concluded, "could be carried out without danger to any of us and you would have no difficulty in eluding them successfully after a few days."

"It is rather bargaining upon their loyalty to me, after all," returned Quickeye with moody brow, "and though they are one and all, scoundrels and villains, they are true to me, it seems."

"For Vera's sake!" said Gordon.

"Ay, for Vera's sake!" returned the captain. "For her sake, what would I not do. It seems a dastardly thing for me to do, to so betray their confidence in me, even though they are what they are, but you are right, Mr. Gordon, the end justifies the means. If they will accept your terms, I will do what you ask."

"Good!" exclaimed Gordon. "I knew you would see the right view of it. Now, if you will allow us to bind you, in order that we may carry out the programme to the letter."

"Certainly—go ahead."

Strong cords were procured, and they were wound round and round the body and limbs of Captain Quickeye until he had every appearance of being firmly bound, as indeed he was.

Then Joe and Gordon carried him into the ante-room and laid him at full length upon the floor where he could be plainly seen from the other side of the wicket.

The preparations being completed, Gordon rapped loudly upon the door with his stick, and immediately heard a rap in reply.

Then he pushed up the wicket.

"Thar he is, by blazes!" cried the voice which had carried on the previous conversation. "Look, fellers, every one of ye! Thar's ther Cap!"

A moment's silence, and then:

"Say, Cap."

"Well, boys, here I am, bound hand and foot, as you see," replied the captain. "It is not a very pleasant position to be placed in, either, I can assure you."

"But how'd them cusses git ther drop on ye, Cap?"

"Never mind how they got it, since you see that I am at their mercy."

"Be ye thirsty?"

"Yes, a little."

"Hev they tole ye ther terms they offer?"

"They have."

"Well, w'ot d' you say?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

"WHEN ROGUES FALL OUT."

For a moment after the counterfeiter outside the wicket asked the question, the captain remained silent—so long in fact that the man spoke again.

We knows thet ye hate ter speak," he said, "'cos ye'r in a bad fix, but then we're willin' ter do a'most anything *you* says, so speak up. Can't ye persuade 'em ter give up Chip, eh?"

"No: I think not."

"D'ye think they'd ruther starve than give him up?"

"Yes, I think they would—I know they would—both of them."

"Well, Cap, ye see, we ain't got no head out here, fit ter tell us how ter go, now thet ye're inside there, so jest tell us w'ot *you* think of the case, an' I'll talk it over with the boys."

The captain appeared to muse for a moment.

At last he spoke.

"Chris," he said, "for I know your voice, I hardly know what to say. You all know out there that I never valued life very highly—at least that I was never afraid to risk it when I had occasion to do so."

"Now, there are several ways of looking at this question."

"We will suppose, first, that you had not made your escape from the cave where I was told that you were prisoners."

"Yes."

"Then it must have followed that my captors here would have taken me away and that my life would have been spared, for a time at least."

"Right!"

"Your coming, however, made them prisoners, and they are now shut up here with me as their hostage, while it is in your power to keep us here until we die."

"Right again, fur sure!"

"Well, if that extremity takes place, I will have died by your hands; in other words it will be you who have killed me."

"By blazes, thet's so! Hadn't thought of that! Go on, Cap!"

"Now, on the other hand, the only thing which makes you hesitate, is the hope of revenge. You seek to be revenged upon a boy—a mere lad!"

"Ay—thet's so!"

"So that if you refuse the terms offered you by Mr. Sharp for my liberty, you will be trading off my life for that of the boy Chipmonk, who after all is nothing to any of you whatever."

"Truer'n gospel!"

"If you had not escaped, Chip would have gone free, you would all of you have been sent to prison for long terms, and I as well, and now, as it is, you are all free, you can, by giving your word, which, understand me, you must keep to the letter, make me free also, and as pay for that, you have simply to allow the detective, the Yankee, and the lad Chipmonk the same privilege—freedom."

"Right!"

"Therefore you are gainers in any case, and all you are compelled to forego, is a bit of needless revenge upon a lad—revenge which is not worth the talk, we are wasting over it, nor the trouble it would take to carry it out."

"Go on, Cap."

"No, there is nothing more to 'go on' about, for I am through."

"Ain't ye a-goin' ter advise us w'ot ter do?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I think it best to leave it to be decided among you."

"If Chip's death is worth the price of my life, why, purchase it so. You must choose for yourselves. I never begged a favor at your hands, and I will do so less than ever, now that you have my life in your power."

"Go away from the wicket, now, and talk it over among you. When you have decided, rap again, and let us hear your decision."

"Right, Cap. I'll do it!"

The voice ceased, and Gordon allowed the wicket to again drop into place.

He and Joe raised the captain from the cavern floor and quickly unbound him, and then all returned to the inner room.

"Do you think they will do it?" asked Gordon of Quickeye.

"Frankly, I do not," he replied. "There are many of them who would, gladly, and without a moment's hesitation, and the fellow I talked with is one of them, but they are in the minority, unless I am greatly mistaken, and in a crowd of that kind the majority always rules. We will hope, however, that I am mistaken. If it were not for Vera, here—"

"Never mind me. Do exactly as you would if I were indeed Chipmonk," broke in Vera, "for so long as I am with you, I am content."

An hour went by, and as yet no challenge to open had come at the door. No knock for further parley.

"Still talking it over," said Quickeye. "The minority is trying to talk over the majority, and they will not succeed. I feel certain of that now."

Several hours went by, and at last there came the long-expected rap upon the door.

Gordon hastened forward, and again pushed open the wicket.

"Where's ther Cap?" asked the same voice that had talked with them before.

"In the inner room," replied Gordon.

"Fetch him out."

"No siree. He has been out here once and that is enough. You can tell me anything you have got to say to him, and I will repeat it word for word, just as it is."

"That ain't square."

"Well, it is as square as you'll get, anyhow."

"All right; here's w'ot I was a-goin' ter say."

"Drive on."

"Some o' ther fellers air fur 'ceptin' yer terms, an' some ain't—in fact, *most* of 'em ain't."

"Proceed."

"I'm one of 'em as is, but somehow my vote don't count fur enough. Them that ain't, says they'll make a compromise like this."

"Go on."

"They insist on havin' Chip—"

"That is no compromise."

"Hole on! Wait till I git through."

"All right; fire away!"

"When they axed fur him afore, they meant to kill him, but now they say if you will deliver him into our hands jest long enough fur each one of us ter hit him one cut apiece across his bare back, with a raw-hide, he kin go with ye arter that."

For reply, Gordon simply withdrew the stick, and allowed the wicket to fall back into place.

But the man on the outside began immediately to knock upon it with great violence, so that he pushed it open again.

"Well, what more?" he asked, sharply and impatiently.

"Don't be so cussed quick, will ye?" growled the counterfeiter, "cos I got a word more ter say."

"Out with it, and begone!"

"I want ye ter tell ther Cap that Chris is fur him, and that I ain't the one, 'r one of 'em either, w'ot proposed ter lash ther boy, an', say!"

"What?"

"Won't yer shoot ef I show my phiz?"

"No."

There was a moment's hesitation, apparently, and then a huge nose, and a pair of thick bearded lips protruded through the little wicket, while the voice came again, this time in a hoarse whisper:

"Say, Mister Detective," it said, "ye kin jist say ter the Cap, that thar's again ter be trouble out here afore he has time ter die in there, an', thet ef ther trouble turns out O. K., he won't die, an' ef it don't he will. Thet's all; good-by!"

The nose and lips disappeared; the voice ceased, and Gordon turned away with a new hope thrilling his pulses.

"What did the words of the counterfeiter portend?" he asked himself.

"Were the few outside who were loyal thinking of fighting for the life of their captain? Were they about engaging in a civil strife over the question which they had been vainly discussing so long?"

If so, there was yet hope.

The bad blood, engendered by the no doubt heated discussion, was apt to break out at any moment into open warfare, and if it should, whichever way it terminated, it would certainly lessen the numbers of the enemy, and consequently increase the chances for the escape of the four captives.

"The captain must not know of this whispered message," thought Gordon. "There is no need of raising false hopes, and he is jist the man to take some measure to prevent them from getting into a fight over their love and loyalty for him."

"I own to myself that I am not merciful. Let them fight among themselves for whatever cause they will, and if they become exterminated, so much the better, for the

people will be not only rid of them, but saved the expense of their trial and imprisonment."

"Ah! what is that?" he exclaimed the next instant, for he had plainly heard a dull sound like the explosion of a firearm.

Stepping quickly back to the door, he raised the wicket a little.

He had held it thus but a moment, when he heard another sound of the same kind, and this time there was no mistaking it, for it was surely the report of a pistol.

It was almost immediately followed by another, and then another, and then several in rapid succession, and then all was still again.

"They are at it surely," he muttered, "but they can't have fought it out so quickly."

He listened attentively for several moments, and was about to let the wicket drop again, when another report rung through the corridors.

"Ah!" muttered Gordon, "I know how it is now. Each side has got behind some sort of protection, and they are firing at every shadow they see. We might creep out and join in the battle, only that they would at once unite again, if we did so, to kill the common enemy."

"Bang!" sounded another report, so near by that Gordon started back and let fall the wicket.

"One side or the other has barricaded itself in this narrow corridor," he thought.

"Well, it is best to let them fight it out. We won't suffer for a few days, and they will have ended it somehow before that time."

He turned and went back into the inner room, where he found his three friends anxiously awaiting his arrival.

"What is the matter out there? What is that firing that I hear?" asked Quickeye.

"They have got into a fight about something I imagine," replied Gordon.

"About me, I wonder?" mused the captain.

"More likely about something of much less importance," returned the brave detective, and then he proceeded to give an account of the conversation he had had with Chris, omitting, however, to mention the whispered message.

It was sufficient, he felt, that one of them should know of it, and it would be soon enough to tell of it when the fight was over and decided.

That, in either way of termination, it would enable them to gain their liberty, he had no doubt, and so, ever self-possessed, he settled himself to await patiently the outcome of the small, but all-important civil warfare outside.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"JUST IN THE NICK OF TIME!"

ONCE every few hours Harry Gordon would go into the ante-room, cautiously raise the wicket and listen, and by and by he would hear the report of a pistol reverberating through the corridors.

Then he would know that the battle outside had not yet been fought to a finish, and he would return to the inner room and wait.

But at last, fully seventy-two hours from the time when he had heard the first pistol-shot, he stood for nearly an hour holding up the wicket, and heard no sound, and he felt that the fight was ended.

Returning quietly to the inner room, he called Joe out by a sign, and told him his hopes, and his reasons for them.

"Now, Joe," he said, when he had finished, "I am going to unbar this door, and creep on my hands and knees out into the corridor. I want you to stand here, ready to receive me if I have to come back quicker than I go out, or in case anything happens to me and I am killed or hurt. I want you to shut and bar the door even though you leave me on the outside, for we must save Vera—Chipmonk—at all events."

"Right ye be!" replied Joe, heartily, "but I've got jest one thing ter say."

"What is that?"

"Why, this: ef the coast is clear, so ter speak, an' ye git ter the end o' this 'ere leetle alley O. K., I want ye ter kim back an' tell us of it, 'cos I want go with ye. See?"

"All right, Joe—I'll do it."

Very cautiously they unbarred the great door, and succeeded in accomplishing the difficult task without making the slightest noise.

Then it swung partly open—enough so that Gordon could pass out into the corridor, which he did, without a moment's hesitation.

The thought occurred to him that he ought to go back and warn Quickeye of what they were doing, so that in case both he and Joe should get far away from the rooms, the entrance would not be left unguarded.

But a second thought convinced him that it would be unnecessary, and so he went onward.

Three times between the doorway and the point where the narrow corridor opened into the bigger one, did he come in contact with the body of a man, lying cold and still in death, and then he reached the outer, or main hall.

All was as still and silent as the grave, and though he listened long and intently, he could detect no sound whatever.

"It is not possible that they are all dead," he thought; "there must be some of them left to tell the tale."

"But where are they?"

"In any case I will go back and speak to Joe, as I promised."

He arose to his feet and hurried back, whispering to Joe all that he had ascertained during his brief sally.

Again the thought occurred to him that it would be best to warn the captain, but again he disregarded it, and he and Joe went forth upon their reconnoitering tour.

Reaching the main corridor, they turned their faces toward the big mess-room, where the counterfeiters had long been in the habit of congregating to play cards, and indulge in any sports which amused them.

Most of the lights were extinguished, but here and there one burnt, its flickering blaze being just sufficient to break the denseness of the gloom.

Several times they stumbled across the bodies of those who had been shot down in the quarrel so recently enacted in the cavern, and they both felt that there could not be many of the counterfeiters left to oppose them.

Still not a sign of life, and they approached nearer and nearer to the large room, where they felt sure that they would find the living remnant of the band.

Presently the door was reached, and lying flat upon his belly, Gordon dragged himself along until he could see into the room.

Then he rubbed his eyes in astonishment.

Not a living thing was to be seen.

"Where can they be?" he muttered. "Of course there are places enough for them to be in, in this immense cavern, but no place so likely as this one."

At that instant Joe squeezed his arm, in warning, and he sunk back upon the earth, as flat as he could possibly render himself.

The reason for the warning was soon apparent, for he could plainly hear footsteps approaching.

He tried to crowd backward out of the doorway, but he did not have time.

In another instant, one of the approaching counterfeiters—and there were three of them—had stepped within the doorway, and tripping over his prostrate form, went sprawling upon the floor.

They were discovered, and there was nothing left for them to do but to fight it out as best they could.

Both men realized that at once, and both fired their revolvers simultaneously.

Only one shot, however, took effect, but the counterfeiter who had first stumbled over Gordon, never rose again.

Both Joe and the detective were upon their feet the instant that their revolvers were discharged, and none too soon, for with oaths of savage fury, the two remaining counterfeiters sprung upon them, endeavoring to draw their knives as they did so.

One succeeded—the one who attacked Harry Gordon; but a well-directed and violent kick sent the deadly weapon whirling away through the air, many feet away from the contestants.

Then it became a silent, terrible double struggle.

Locked tightly together in that frantic em-

brace, they tugged and writhed and twisted, each struggling for the mastery.

But it so happened that they were well matched in both instances.

Joe had found his equal, or very nearly so, Gordon had found his.

Twice had the detective been nearly down—twice had he almost conquered his foe, but each had regained whatever advantage had been lost, and the struggle went on more desperately than ever.

It was a battle of endurance—of breath, and must ultimately have gone against Harry Gordon but for an accident.

During the struggle, the two battles had been at one moment wide apart, and at another, close together.

Just as Gordon was thinking that he could not stand the terrible strain much longer, something flew through the air and hit his opponent on the head, instantly knocking him senseless.

He did not know what it was at the time, and for a moment thought that somebody had come to his assistance.

But though a mystery to him, it had happened very naturally.

He and his opponent had been bending over until their faces were quite near the ground, while Joe and his foe were struggling near them.

Joe had made a violent effort to lift his adversary in the air and throw him, and must have succeeded but that the fellow's foot struck something which saved him.

His hard heel had come in contact with his friend's head, and thus won the battle for right, for as soon as Gordon got his wits about him, he struck the fellow who was fighting Joe, on the head with the butt of his revolver, and so the struggle in the dark was over and won.

"I wonder ef thar's enny more?" panted Joe.

"Who knows?" replied Gordon. "Let us hurry back as quickly as possible, at all events."

They started rapidly through the corridor toward the captain's room, but as they reached the doorway, they paused in horror, for they plainly heard a voice say:

"You've got jest five seconds to live!"

"Hold!" they heard the captain's stern voice replying. "You shall not harm the boy except through me."

"Haw, haw, haw!" sounded back a derisive laugh; "we're a-goin' ter let daylight through ye, too, Cap, 'cos we think you've betrayed us. Bill, you take the boy, an' I'll shoot ther Cap. I likes the job, I does. I'll count five, an' when I say five, shoot!"

"One!"

Two forms hurried through the great doorway, and crept noiselessly toward the entrance to the inner room.

"Two!"

The two forms reached the entrance, and two hands, each holding a revolver, were thrust forward.

"Three!"

Two reports rung out as one, and two counterfeiters, the last of all that lawless band except the two lying senseless outside in the corridor, fell forward upon their faces—dead!

"Just in the nick of time!" exclaimed Joe, leaping forward over the bodies, and for the second time raising Vera in the air far over his head.

"Excuse me!" he said, as he put her down; "purty soon, when ye git thet air dress onto ye ag'in, I won't dast to say nothin', but now ye'r nothin' but a chipmonk, and nobody 'ith enny sense 's 'fraid o' one o' them critters. Change yer togs naow, 's quick 's ye kin, fur we've got ter light outen here!"

Gordon related as rapidly and concisely as possible, all that had transpired and why he had left them without warning.

As soon as Vera was Vera again, they started for the entrance to the cave, leaving the still senseless counterfeiters who had fallen in the struggle with Gordon and Joe, to recover consciousness and gain their liberty as best they could, at their leisure.

It was during the night when they reached Londonderry and sought accommodations at its only hotel, where genial John Farwell gave them every attention, for it was not often that his house was graced by such distinguished looking people as Captain Quick-eye and his beautiful wife.

Joe, also, sought a bed there for the night, for his home was a long distance off, and besides, he meant on the morrow to return to Glebe Mountain to get his dogs, Pomp and Start.

And here, for the present we will leave them.

To recount the history of the days which followed, would be devoid of incident, and therefore of but little interest to the whilom reader.

Captain Quick-eye was firm in his determination to begin life over again, with his beautiful Vera at his side, a source of constant happiness to him, and the means whereby he could build up once more the ruins of his reputation and honor, until it should rise like a Phoenix from the ashes, a beautiful emblem and perfect structure of self-asserted manhood.

He was resolved to go abroad; to seek in some distant land, the new home which he meant to make so beautiful, garlanded as it would be with love, with confidence, with perfect trust, and best of all with happiness.

The inspector never saw Vera again, although he received a very non-committal letter from her, informing him that she had decided to withdraw from the arena of detective life, even before she had entered it.

Shall we see them again?

Yes, once more, in the next chapter, and then their history will have been told.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CONCLUSION.

In a quiet English village resides a happy family, father, mother and son.

Years have gone by since the scene recorded in the last chapter, but they have been years of mutual love and content to the three who settled down in an unostentatious cottage in the modest village.

The father is an artist of considerable ability, and the mother contributes to the columns of the magazines.

The son, now a young man, is the idol of their hearts, and is in every sense worthy of their adoration.

He is just beginning a career at the bar, which promises to be a successful one, and although his parents have oftentimes been obliged to deny themselves many comforts in order that he may receive a fit education, their greatest comfort has been in their self-denial for his good.

They never speak of the old life—Vera and her husband, and only one link of it remains; and that is the annual visit made them by Harry Gordon, who is now married, and says he has given up detective work for good.

He has never had cause to regret the step he took when he told Captain Quick-eye to go free and begin life anew, for he never visits them without being re-impressed by the love the poorer people bear for the foreigners.

Many are the charities they do and are constantly doing; many are their self-denials to assist others, and whenever the husband and father sees the spectacle of a young man just starting on the downward path, he puts forth his hand and heart, ay, all that he possesses, to save him.

Does he succeed?

Sometimes—and one success of that kind will bloom forever, a constant blessing to the world.

Beware, young man, of the "little things" in life. Do not put your foot upon the slippery ice of chance, no matter how strong it may be near the shore, for out in the center it is thin, and the water beneath it is cold and deep. It is harder to keep near the edges than to keep off altogether, and easier to stay off when off, than to get off after having been on.

Those who, like Captain Quick-eye, have walked down the dangerous path to the very verge of total disaster, and have then been saved, are the exception—ay, one in ten thousand.

But the fitful chapters of his life are told.

Joe Alden still lives in Londonderry, and still pursues his old vocation; good, honest, much-respected Joe.

He was greatly astonished when he learned that Chip was not Chip, and said "he

thought ther lad kinder got skeered easier'n usual."

And now all is told, and so let us draw the curtains and say "Good-night."

THE END.

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